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**Creative practices as research:
Exploring the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China**

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
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Abstract

This research focuses on non-visual artistic collaborative practice between artists with visual impairment in China and a sighted researcher, encompassing multi-sensory creative practices, including non-visual photography, improvised music, dance, and installation art. A mixed-methods approach integrating qualitative methods (collaborative art practices, semi-structured interviews) and quantitative analysis of audience survey data was employed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomena. The resulting data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), and Descriptive Statistical Analysis (DSA) to systematically examine the role of embodied perception and spatial awareness in artistic expression. Further attention was given to how artists constructed meaning and created a sense of place through sensory interaction. The researcher engaged in the collaborative process through multiple roles – academic, practitioner, and curator – undertaking sustained reflexive inquiry to analyse the mechanisms of multi-sensory creation and cognitive transformation.

Through collaborative art practices and exhibitions carried out in both China and New Zealand, the study illuminated the dynamic function of embodied difference in multi-sensory collaborative practice, critically challenging visual-centric aesthetic norms and dominant assumptions about creative practices. Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and Crip theory provide robust theoretical foundations for understanding disability experiences. CDS focuses on critiques of social structures, while Crip theory emphasises the deconstruction of marginalised bodies. Despite their complementary insights, these two frameworks are frequently used separately in existing research. Dialogue and intertextual engagement between CDS and Crip theory show certain limitations and

remain somewhat underdeveloped. Meanwhile, most current studies concentrate on theoretical development. In contrast, their practical application, especially in artistic creation, embodied creative practices, and cross-cultural collaborative art, remains underexplored. This research integrates both CDS and Crip theory to examine how multi-sensory artistic practices can challenge normative assumptions about perception, disability, and authorship. These frameworks are applied to analyse collaborative processes, audience responses, and curatorial strategies, highlighting how disability is both culturally constructed and generatively embodied.

At the theoretical level, the study employed a phenomenological perspective to emphasise how individuals construct unique perceptual pathways through sustained embodied interaction with their environment. This orientation resonated strongly with traditional Chinese Daoist philosophy, particularly the principles of natural spontaneity and *Wu-Wei* (Hansen, 2024), which emphasise harmony between body and world. Daoist thought values the fluidity of bodily interaction with nature, immediate perception, and holistic awareness, paralleling phenomenology's concern with embodied experience and the lifeworld. A convergence of these two philosophical traditions was articulated in the research, offering an intercultural theoretical foundation for understanding how artists with visual impairment create art through non-visual sensory modes. This fusion of Eastern and Western thought expanded phenomenology's applicability in sensory studies and opened a critically grounded, locally situated space for disability arts research.

The findings revealed a diversity of perceptual strategies and creative capacities among the Chinese artists with visual impairment. Across the four art forms, distinct sensory pathways were activated through non-visual means. In non-visual photography, artists constructed spatial

understanding by combining auditory cues, tactile exploration, and imaginative perception. Improvised dance revealed how bodily movement attuned to environmental affordances could open alternative channels of sensation. In musical improvisation, layered sound and embodied rhythm emerged through muscle memory and somatic responsiveness. Installation art, meanwhile, engaged audiences through the tactile qualities of materials, inviting sensory exploration beyond sight. These practices underscored the centrality of non-visual senses in creative work and redefined the boundaries of artistic expression, contributing to a theoretically grounded and socially relevant framework for non-visual art research.

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List of Abbreviations

CDS	Critical Disability Studies
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DSA	Descriptive Statistical Analysis
GAPA	Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SOD	School of Design

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Senses play a pivotal role in stimulating inspiration, artistic creation, and public engagement with art. Vision has long been regarded as the most dominant and complex human sense, thereby receiving the greatest scholarly attention. Traditional conceptions of art frequently prioritised vision, positioning it at the centre of artistic perception and production. However, even within highly visual environments, human perception of the world remained a richly multi-sensory experience (Alwashmi et al., 2024; Luo et al., 2024). Non-visual senses, including hearing and touch, fulfil indispensable functions in sensory engagement. Through a range of perceptual processes, artists living with sensory disability developed distinctive forms of artistic expressions (Vermeersch, 2013). Scholarly research on the sensory engagement and creative practices of artists with visual impairment examined how non-visual senses were integrated into their artistic processes. Such investigations challenged the long-standing dominance of visual-centric paradigms and redefined the role of sensory modalities in creative production, offering deeper insights into the unique artistic strategies of artists with visual impairment.

Attentional and perceptual experiences are mutually shaped by cultural contexts and individual embodied differences. This research, conducted in both China and New Zealand, investigates how disability is framed as a culturally constructed narrative of embodiment (Campbell, 2009). Both China and New Zealand signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which articulated the fundamental human rights of people with disabilities. The CRPD aimed to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and

fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities while fostering respect for their inherent dignity (United Nations, 2006).

Although both China and New Zealand have ratified the Convention, the extent to which cultural traditions and distinctions influenced the lived experiences, perceptions, and governance of disability varied across societies (Artiles et al., 2010; Bevan-Brown, 2010). The cultural model of disability prioritises inquiry into the relationship between disability, culture, and artistic expression (Sandahl, 2018). Joshua and Schillmeier (2010) described the cultural perspective as an approach that investigates how individuals with disabilities are portrayed and understood within the cultural domains of art, media, and literature. They referred to this shift in focus as a “cultural turn” in Disability Studies (Goodley, 2017, p. 23).

Building on prior scholarship, this study focuses on how disability art is shaped by divergent cultural-aesthetic logics in China and New Zealand. In China, state-sponsored programmes often frame artists with disability as symbols of perseverance or patriotic harmony (China Disabled Persons’ Federation Office et al., 2021; Sernelj, 2021). In New Zealand, disability-led initiatives, such as the Tapatahi Accessibility Action Plan (Creative NZ, 2024b), foreground artistic self-determination by centring the voices and leadership of artists with disability in cultural policy and practice. However, the systematic and practice-based comparisons remain scarce. This gap motivates the study’s cross-cultural collaborative design, positioning creative practice as a method to interrogate how disability, art, and cultural identity intersect in each context.

This research was undertaken across China and New Zealand, not as the result of an initial plan to conduct a cross-cultural comparison but as a consequence of the researcher’s transnational

circumstances. The opportunity to work in both contexts arose from the researcher's lived and creative experiences in both countries while the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated that much of the collaborative work take place in China. As the projects unfolded, the cross-cultural dimension emerged organically, shaped by these practical circumstances and by engagement with both cultural settings. This positioning enabled an exploration of disability and creative practice within two distinct cultural, political, and institutional contexts: China, with its collectivist ethos and state-driven disability initiatives, where institutional narratives strongly shape representations of disability; and New Zealand, where disability-led and community-driven models increasingly foreground self-representation and rights-based approaches. By working across both sites, the study aimed to generate deeper insight into how cultural systems shape the creative strategies, social recognition, and lived experiences of artists with visual impairment.

Originally, the research was designed to include more in-person collaborative practices and travel across both countries. However, due to the onset of the COVID-19 restrictions, a number of methodological and logistical changes were necessary. International travel restrictions and health regulations led to adjustments in the research plan, including a stronger reliance on local collaborators, remote communication tools, and digital documentation. These changes shaped not only the research process but also the form and content of the collaborative artworks and audience engagement strategies.

In both China and New Zealand, substantial research has addressed disability-related issues, including employment, community participation, and engagement with art and culture (Bevan-Brown & Walker, 2013; Good et al., 2016; Huang, 2019). Limited scholarship, however, had examined the

sociocultural contexts of creative practice, particularly in relation to artists with visual impairment, or explored how the rights outlined in the CRPD might be advanced through a cross-cultural lens. Both countries had committed to monitoring the progressive realisation of the disability rights enshrined in the CRPD. In China, an emerging network in disability rights and Disability Studies had begun to form. The present research aims to contribute to the growing body of scholarship informing this field.

The creative sensory experiences of artists with visual impairment and the cross-cultural understandings of creativity, disability, and sensory engagement remain areas in need of deeper investigation and development. This research examines embodied perceptions and differences among artists with visual impairment, exploring how cultural, social, and environmental contexts shaped the perceptual processes underpinning their creative practices in China. Consideration was given to how artistic engagement by these artists contributed to reshaping public perception of disability in both China and New Zealand. The inquiry reflected the evolving construction of visual impairment and disability as cultural embodiments and narrative expressions (Shildrick, 2020). Attention was further directed towards how audiences perceived, interpreted, and responded to the multi-sensory and multimedia works created by artists with visual impairment.

While scholarly interest in sensory perception has a long-standing presence across disciplines such as phenomenology, sensory anthropology, and Disability Studies, much of this work has historically centred on normative sensory modalities or framed sensory disability in terms of deficit or compensation. Although recent studies have begun to explore the sensory experiences of individuals with disabilities, few have employed creative practice as a primary methodological lens to investigate how artists with visual impairment engage with, and express, non-visual modes of perception. This

study builds on and extends such approaches by foregrounding perception as an interactive, embodied process, and by integrating cross-cultural perspectives to examine how disability, artistic production, and cultural identity coalesce in underexplored ways.

1.1 Research Statement and Objectives

The research aimed to create a space for learning from the visual artistic and creative practices of individuals with visual impairment, with a particular focus on exploring sensory experiences. The inquiry examined how the creative practices of artists with visual impairment, along with community engagement, contributed to sociocultural understandings of visual impairment, disability, and creative expression.

In order to engage with artists with visual impairment, the research was structured around a creative practice-based inquiry, underpinned by a mixed methods approach that integrated qualitative and quantitative analysis. This combination of artistic practice, Disability Studies, phenomenological inquiry, and audience research constituted a transdisciplinary framework, understood as more than simply combining methods from different disciplines. In this study, transdisciplinary research is understood as the co-production of knowledge across academic, creative, and lived domains, emphasising the inclusion of non-academic participants in the process of knowledge generation (Rigolot, 2020). Within this framework, the experiential expertise of artists with visual impairment is recognised as epistemically generative rather than merely illustrative.

Unlike multidisciplinary approaches, which juxtapose perspectives (Benagiano & Brosens, 2014), or interdisciplinary approaches, which integrate tools within disciplinary logics (Ryan et al., 2023), a transdisciplinary stance interrogates the value hierarchies that organise knowledge (Kurian,

2017). A transdisciplinary stance is committed to methodological choices that are accountable to these values, such as collaborative making, mixed methods, and reflexive creation (Burnard et al., 2021). As Moirano et al. (2020) argued, effective transdisciplinary collaboration requires the integration of diverse epistemologies and methods through active, co-creative processes to address complex and context-specific creative challenges. This study exemplifies such an approach through the collaboration between artists with visual impairment, a non-disabled researcher, and diverse audience groups in China and New Zealand.

Creative collaborative practices, as a mode of research, were grounded in perceptual modalities and creative processes, and were informed by multi-sensory and transdisciplinary approaches rooted in Critical Disability Studies (CDS). This methodological stance offered alternative perspectives on perception, disability, and creative representation while emphasising their intersections with diverse cultural contexts. The inquiry involved an exploration of the artists' creative processes as well as the collection of their reflections on sensory experience and artistic engagement. Through sustained collaborative practice with artists with disabilities, and reflexive analytical practice, the research examined the relationship between creative processes and artistic values situated within cultural settings. This investigation critically challenged conventional assumptions about creative practice, with a specific emphasis on the contributions and experiences of artists with visual impairment in relation to art and disability theory.

This qualitative research involved four collaborative projects, co-developed by four artists with visual impairment and the researcher. Four exhibitions were curated to present the outcomes of these collaborations, which were further contextualised through semi-structured interviews with six

artists and post-exhibition audience surveys (n=152). The data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), and Descriptive Statistical Analysis (DSA). The findings demonstrate how the artists with visual impairment reconfigured artistic creation through non-visual sensory modalities, drawing attention to embodied differences within sensory experiences. These results revealed a dynamic interplay between sensory engagement, collaborative practices, and audience perceptions of disability and artistic potential. In addition, the study highlighted the significance of embodied differences, place-making and environmental affordances in shaping creative expression and meaning-making.

1.2 Hypothesis and Research Questions

This project hypothesises that collaborative art practices co-developed by artists with visual impairment in China and the non-disabled researcher holds the potential to reshape societal and cultural perceptions of creativity, art, and disability. To critically investigate how such perceptions are culturally constructed and contested, a cross-cultural approach was adopted, involving both China and New Zealand. While China provided a context shaped by collectivist values and state-driven narratives, New Zealand offered a contrasting model that foregrounds disability-led initiatives and rights-based cultural policy. By emphasising non-visual sensory modalities in creative practices, the study tests the hypothesis that collaborative art-making can reshape cultural perceptions of creativity, art, and disability. This process involved rethinking traditional narratives surrounding disability and the possibilities inherent in artistic expression. For instance, the investigation examined how artists with visual impairment navigated the sensory world and how their creative practices contributed to sociocultural understandings of visual impairment, disability, and artistic expression.

Engagement with communities in China and New Zealand took place through exhibitions and interactions with audiences, enabling the collection of responses and reflections on the works and narratives presented by artists with visual impairment. This approach facilitated a deeper awareness and understanding of disability, art, and culture across and within both cultural contexts. The focus extended beyond the exhibition environment to critically explore questions concerning the cultural construction of disability, the perception and experience of visual impairment, and the interpretation and value of creative practices within distinct sociocultural frameworks.

Guided by CDS and Crip theory (Goodley, 2017), the research examined how the creative practices of artists with visual impairment contributed to reshaping dominant interpretations of disability at large. Particular attention was given to the temporal dimensions and future possibilities for disabled individuals (Kafer, 2013). This perspective challenged conventional assumptions regarding creativity, culture, and artistic expression. The integration of Crip theory and the concept of embodied difference offered a framework through which disability could be understood as a lived and generative experience, encouraging a more inclusive recognition of difference, diversity, and heterogeneity (McRuer, 2006).

Creative practice supported the co-development of artists' narratives and facilitated critical conversations about normativity and the cultural framing of disability in contemporary settings (Lisette, 2021). Engagement with art and sensory experiences reimaged the artistic lives of disabled individuals (Löfgren-Mårtenson, 2013) and encouraged audiences in China and New Zealand to critically reflect upon cultural frameworks and social perceptions surrounding disability.

Therefore, the research questions are:

- RQ 1: How does the perceptual, social and cultural construction of creative practice of the artists with visual impairment challenge prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art, and vision impairment in China and New Zealand?
- RQ 2: How do artists with visual impairment navigate and challenge visual-centric creative traditions?
- RQ 3: How can the dual perspectives of the participant-researcher, as collaborator, co-developer, and curator, and the artists with visual impairment be integrated into creative practice as research?
- RQ 4: How do the multi-media and multi-sensory artistic practices of artists with visual impairment shape audience understandings of culture, art, and disability?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive literature review and critical understandings of disability, visual impairment and non-visual art, and cultural perspectives on disability and creativity. Section 2.2 begins with a review of foundational theoretical perspectives on disability, examining the binary of medical and social models and introduces contemporary disability perspectives, such as CDS and Crip theory. These perspectives illustrate disability as a lived experience that not only reflects tensions between bodies and society but also significantly relates to processes of identity construction. Building upon this foundation, CDS and Crip theory further expand theoretical frameworks around disability identity, highlighting the value of body difference and actively challenging mainstream norms through artistic and cultural practices.

Section 2.3 concentrates on visual impairment and non-visual artistic practices, critiquing the long-standing dominance of ocularcentrism in Western culture, and emphasising the significance of multisensory experiences in artistic creation and perception. Visual impairment is reframed not as an obstacle but as an opportunity to reorganise sensory pathways, promoting sensory diversification and decentralisation of vision. Moreover, this section underscores the core roles of embodied perception and environmental affordance within disability art practices, proposing art creation as a dynamic, multisensory interaction between individuals and their environments. Through a critical review of existing literature on artistic practices such as non-visual photography, tactile installations, and sound installations, this section examines how bodily differences and perceptual habits have been theorised

and conceptualised, enabling perceptual and cognitive reconstruction through reflexive and multisensory engagement.

Section 2.4 discusses understandings of disability and artistic practices in the cultural contexts of China and New Zealand. The review of literature in this section highlights how cultural contexts profoundly influence public perceptions of disability, the social functions of art, and pathways of artistic expression. In China, disability art navigates between state-led policies and grassroots initiatives, strongly reflecting collectivist values. Conversely, New Zealand's art environment has progressively become more inclusive, driven by Māori and Western bicultural frameworks alongside disability rights discourse. This section emphasises the profound impact of perceptual habits, aesthetic orientations, and social structures shaped by different cultural contexts on the understanding and evaluation of disability art. Art, therefore, is positioned not merely as a medium of expression but as a critical space to produce cultural meanings and construct social identities.

In summary, the chapter provides a framework for the research that is based on critical engagement with existing models, integration of transdisciplinary theories (such as phenomenology, CDS and Crip theory) against a critical understanding of disability to support the study's aim to contribute to a more inclusive, embodied and culturally aware understanding of visual disability and art.

2.2 Framing Disability

2.2.1 Disability as Lived Experience

Over the past three decades, the binary opposition between the medical model and the social model of disability has shaped the dominant discourse in Disability Studies, framing disability either

as an individual biomedical deficit or as a socially constructed phenomenon (Goodley, 2017; Rembis, 2010). The medical model conceptualises disability as an individual's physiological or psychological impairment, emphasising rehabilitation treatments and medical interventions (Huda, 2021). In contrast, the social model challenges this perspective by positing that disability arose not from individual bodily differences but, rather, from barriers imposed by the social environment (World Health Organization, 2022).

The medical (or biomedical) model of disability represents a major development in modern medicine since the mid-19th century, replacing earlier moral and religious frameworks (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). This model frames disability as a clinical issue characterised by bodily dysfunction or limitations, requiring treatment, correction, or normalisation by health professionals, such as physicians and therapists (Chandler & Munday, 2020). Frequently described as a "personal tragedy", this model tends to define disability in negative terms (Zaks, 2024, p. 3249), and assumes that individuals with disabilities should adapt in order to attain social values and normative status (Amundson et al., 2022).

However, this medical perspective neglects the reality that disability is a universal experience which individuals may encounter at various stages of life (World Health Organization, 2011). Although the medical model continues to hold relevance in medical and rehabilitation fields, critics argue that it fails to account for how people with disability construct positive life experiences through social support and cultural identity (Goering, 2015). The core critique of the medical model lies in its tendency to shift structural and social exclusion onto individuals, framing inequality as a personal issue rather than a systemic one (Hogan, 2019).

However, the United Nations CRPD, adopted in 2006, presents an influential argument regarding the nature of disability. This perspective suggests that disability should not be regarded through the lens of victimhood or oppression at all, but instead be understood as encompassing diverse experiences of survival, resistance, and recovery (United Nations, 2006).

The social model shifts the understanding of disability from individual responsibility to societal responsibility, promoting the widespread implementation of anti-discrimination laws, accessibility policies, and social inclusion initiatives. Slee (2018) further argued that disability is fundamentally an issue of public discourse that needs to be comprehended through social dialogue and heightened public awareness. For instance, when built environments lack accessible features such as ramps, elevators, or Braille signage, wheelchair users and individuals with sensory impairments face restrictions on their social participation (Park & Chowdhury, 2018).

Moreover, societal failures to provide equitable educational and employment opportunities exacerbate injustice and marginalisation experienced by disabled communities (Shakespeare, 2014). As Smilges (2023) pointed out, the concept of disability inherently embodies a paradox: it simultaneously exposes discrimination and inequality within society and symbolises the potential for societal recognition, acceptance of diversity, and positive change. Disability should be understood as a valuable manifestation of diversity within the human experience (Goodley, 2020), calling for more comprehensive and inclusive research approaches. This tension between disability as a site of structural exclusion and discrimination, and disability as a form of human diversity with the potential to generate social recognition and positive change, has driven scholarly exploration into the multifaceted social implications and cultural meanings of disability.

However, despite the significant contributions made by the social model in advancing accessibility policies and advocating for disability rights, several limitations remain evident. The model places disproportionate emphasis on external environmental barriers while overlooking the embodied experiences and subjective perceptions of individuals with disabilities, thereby failing to fully capture their lived realities (Barnes et al., 2019). Shakespeare (2017) observed that the social model risks oversimplifying disability by attributing the challenges faced by disabled individuals entirely to societal conditions, a perspective that remains overly reductive. Building on this critique, Berghs et al. (2019) argued that the social model has become rigidly entrenched as a narrowly defined rights-based framework, one that requires evolution to remain responsive to shifting social conditions and the diverse realities of people with disability.

This need for an evolved, context-responsive approach is further underscored by the challenges surrounding the implementation of the CRPD worldwide. Although 191 countries and the European Union had ratified the CRPD as of May 2025 (United Nations, 2006), national implementation remains uneven. Many governments, particularly in the Global South, face significant challenges in aligning domestic policies, service infrastructures, and legal frameworks with the obligations outlined in the CRPD (Celik, 2017; Chaney, 2022). For instance, comparative research shows that austerity measures and the contraction of welfare systems in several Global South contexts (such as Guatemala, the Philippines, South Africa, Kenya, and Jamaica) have significantly worsened living conditions for people with disability and undermined the CRPD realisation (Grech et al., 2023). Additional barriers, including weak enforcement, inadequate data, and absent complaint systems,

continue to constrain implementation, as reflected in the regional findings of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (2022).

In light of these challenges, Lawson and Beckett (2021) questioned whether the traditional social model remained suitable for increasingly complex social environments, advocating for a “social model of human rights” (p. 363) that placed human rights at its core. To date, however, disability groups had yet to articulate a clearly defined alternative capable of surpassing the existing model.

Presenting the medical and social models as directly opposing frameworks risks oversimplifying the complexities of disability, which frequently involves multifaceted and intersecting factors. A more nuanced theoretical and practical approach is therefore required to move beyond this binary divide. Since the rise of the disability rights movement in the 1960s, significant global progress has been achieved through legislative measures, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) in the United States and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) in the United Kingdom, both of which have played a crucial role in expanding opportunities for civic participation among people with disability. Despite these advancements, much of the movement has predominantly centred on civil rights, frequently overlooking intersecting dimensions such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Addressing these omissions necessitates engagement with a more inclusive and transformative perspective.

2.2.2 Theoretical Perspectives of Disability

As mentioned in Section 2.2.1, disability has long been framed through a binary opposition between the medical model and the social model. While this dichotomy has been foundational in shaping disability discourse and rights-based advocacy, it has increasingly been critiqued for its

limitations in capturing the nuanced, embodied, and culturally situated dimensions of disability experience (Anderson-Chavarria, 2022; Goodley, 2017; Thorneycroft, 2024). In response, CDS has emerged as a broad transdisciplinary field that reconceptualises disability as a social, political, and cultural phenomenon. Within this field, Crip theory offers a more specific lens, drawing from queer theory, to challenge normative assumptions about ability, temporality, and embodiment.

This study draws on CDS and Crip theory to examine how disability is not merely experienced or represented but actively negotiated through collaborative artistic practices. These frameworks provide critical tools for exploring how artists with visual impairment engage with non-visual modalities, co-develop knowledge, and articulate embodied difference in cross-cultural contexts. By moving beyond deficit-based and social-based interpretations, CDS and Crip theory enable a more expansive and inclusive understanding of creative practice, agency, and cultural participation. The following two sub-sections examine each framework in turn, highlighting their relevance to the sensory, embodied, and collaborative dimensions of disability art explored in this research.

A. Critical Disability Studies (CDS). The field of Disability Studies has long been dominated by the binary opposition between the medical model and the social model (Dwyer, 2022; Shildrick, 2020). However, both frameworks exhibit significant limitations in accounting for the sensory multiplicity and transdisciplinary intersections inherent in experiences of disability. This is particularly evident in the context of people with disability, especially artists with visual impairment, whose practices are often framed within dualistic models (Dubiel, 2022). These models can sometimes frame the artwork as being shaped by perceived limitations of impairment (Solvang, 2018) or by an assumed inability to adapt to social barriers (Ikeda et al., 2022), which may overlook the ways in which artists negotiate,

resist, and reconfigure these constraints through embodied and creative means (Thorneycroft, 2024). Such framings can risk overlooking the ways in which artists with visual impairment may construct their artistic practices through intersectional identities, engaging reflexively with both the embodied realities of impairment and the sociocultural barriers they encounter (Baker & Green, 2018; Creed, 2018).

Over the past two decades, Disability Studies has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from a discipline focused primarily on rehabilitation to a transdisciplinary field that integrates theoretical inquiry and practical solutions (Shildrick, 2020). For example, CDS and Crip theory offer more inclusive and critical perspectives, challenging binary understandings of disability and emphasising the agency of people with disability in cultural, artistic, and identity-formation contexts (Goodley, 2017). These frameworks provide valuable insights into how disability can be reinterpreted through artistic and cross-disciplinary practices.

CDS employs diverse disciplinary approaches to critically examine the phenomenon of disability, drawing on perspectives from philosophy and anthropology, history and sociology, ethnology, literary studies and linguistics, media studies, and spiritual studies. Goodley et al. (2019) argued that the aim of CDS is to use disability as a starting point for exploring a broader range of political, theoretical, and practical issues that are of significance to all. For example, CDS is concerned with understanding the interplay between the concepts of “normality” and “disability” (Goodley, 2014, p. 31), the intrinsic value of disability (Goodley et al., 2018), and the nuanced distinctions between the label of disability and the spectrum of human diversity (Shakespeare, 2017). Moreover, CDS proposes a causal relationship between the body and disability, emphasising the need for a deeper

understanding of the interwoven experiences of impairment, embodiment, and agency (Davis, 2016; Goodley, 2017).

The combination of theories from multiple fields emphasises the complexity of CDS (Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Murray, 2023; Thomas, 2017; Watson & Vehmas, 2019). However, within the domains of art and creativity, researching using a CDS framing has yet to adequately engage with the embodied experiences of individuals, the practical application of artistic practices, and the development of nuanced narrative strategies (Ashley et al., 2022). This gap is particularly relevant to the present study, which examines how artists with visual impairment negotiate creative agency through multisensory collaboration and challenge dominant cultural narratives by generating alternative forms of expression rooted in embodied and non-visual experience. This ongoing gap in the literature parallels broader issues in cultural representation. While academic discourse continues to evolve, as Hadley (2020) noted, the field remains in a phase of ongoing exploration, marked by reconfigurations of disability identity and perspective. As McDonald and Hadley (2019) observed, a preliminary analysis of representations of disability in mainstream performing arts, culture, and media reveals that people with disabilities are frequently portrayed through symbolic frames of “trauma, tragedy, pity, fear, or inspiration” (p. 3). Similarly, Ellcessor (2017) noted that mainstream media representations often rely on stereotypical depictions, such as inspirational narratives or pity-driven perspectives.

My Gimpy Life, a web series created by and starring Teal Sherer (2014), follows the awkward everyday experiences of an actress with disability navigating Hollywood. Portrayed through a comedic and semi-autobiographical lens, the series offers a critique of dominant portrayals that frame people

with disability as heroic, brave, or inspirational figures engaged in struggle. Instead, the series seeks to provide alternative narrative forms that promote equitable participation of people with disabilities in media production and cultural expression (Ellcessor, 2017). The series' protagonist, Sherer, critiques the theatre director's remarks about her being "inspirational" and "brave," arguing that such comments are reductive and dismissive of her professionalism as an actor. As this example illustrates, artists with disability frequently resist being framed through narratives of exceptionalism and instead seek recognition based on their artistic merit and creative agency, rather than being defined by the disability status.

Moreover, Goodley et al. (2019) argued that disability has to some extent become an object of curiosity for theorists and disciplines, which undermines the position of people with disabilities and their allies as driving subjects and expressers of theory. One of the consequences of the impact of critical disability research on many disciplines and areas of practice is that people with disabilities are drawn to being interesting objects of study rather than arbiters and a source of knowledge production (Hall, 2019). This objectification diminishes the role of people with disability as active agents and theorists, reinforcing a dynamic in which disability is viewed rather than understood. For example, the late Stella Young, a writer, comedian, and journalist who used a wheelchair for mobility, delivered a TED Talk in 2014 titled *I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much* (Kite et al., 2022). She concluded by stating that disability itself does not make a person exceptional; rather, it is the act of questioning one's assumptions about disability that holds true significance. From her perspective, being overly compassionate or excessively expressive in evaluating disability is equally unfair.

In addition, Goodley et al. (2019) questioned whether the potential of disability theory and activism is diminished when disability is treated as a secondary or thematic concern within broader academic agendas, rather than as a foundational framework for critical inquiry. This tendency risks positioning disability as an illustrative example rather than recognising people with disabilities as producers and sources of knowledge. Such an approach challenges the practical relevance of research that claims to be grounded in the CDS framework but fails to centre disabled epistemologies and agency.

However, in contrast to these limitations within academic discourse, some cultural and artistic interventions offer compelling examples of how disability can be centred as a site of knowledge, creativity, and activism. An increasing number of artistic works are currently shifting their narrative perspectives, from portraying people with disabilities as objects of pity or admiration to presenting them as active agents of social change.

For instance, *Then Barbara Met Alan* (Seale, 2022), a BBC television drama written by Jack Thorne and Genevieve Barr, offers a powerful dramatisation of the founding of the Disabled People's Direct Action Network (DAN) in the United Kingdom. Centring the lives of Barbara Lisicki and Alan Holdsworth, two cabaret performers with disability turned activists, the film foregrounds the lived experiences, political struggles, and creative resistance of people with disability. The drama adopts an insider perspective, centring the lived experiences of people with disabilities. Rather than portraying them as passive recipients of care, it presents people with disability as leaders in social movements and as agents of systemic change. This shift in narrative focus aligns with a CDS perspective, which emphasises agency, resistance, and the socio-political construction of disability. Through archival

footage, personal testimonies, and collective advocacy scenes, the film illustrates how people with disability have actively shaped policy and public discourse, thereby foregrounding their subjectivity within broader historical processes.

While *Then Barbara Met Alan* exemplifies the potential of media to foreground disability agency and reframe dominant narratives, such examples remain relatively rare and are often situated within Western cultural contexts. Many disability-focused artworks and discourses continue to reproduce tokenistic or individualised portrayals. In contrast, this study seeks to extend the critical insights of CDS by situating disability as both a methodological entry point and a creative force, particularly within non-visual, cross-cultural collaborative art practices involving artists with visual impairment. By doing so, the research not only critiques dominant representational norms but also contributes to expanding the theoretical and practical scope of disability arts discourse.

B. Crip theory. The use of the word “crip” is a deliberate attempt to reclaim a negative term as a positive one. This provocation is aimed at challenging people's perceptions of what is considered normal or deviant and to encourage them to confront their biases towards people with disabilities (Bone, 2017). The intention is to make people uncomfortable, to shift their perspectives, and to recognise the lives of the individuals who have different experiences. The use of this term acknowledges the common response of non-disabled people to difference and aims to create a more inclusive and accepting society (Mery Karlsson & Rydström, 2023).

Crip theory is a theoretical framework situated within the broader field of CDS. Emerging at the intersection of Disability Studies and queer theory, it challenges normative assumptions about the body, time, and identity. One of its foundational concepts is McRuer's (2006) notion of “compulsory

able-bodiedness”, which describes the pervasive societal assumption that able-bodiedness is natural, desirable, and unmarked (p. 197). This norm marginalises the people whose bodies or minds deviate from dominant standards. In response, Crip theory reclaims disability as a site of cultural, political, and epistemological possibility, foregrounding fluidity, non-normativity, and the value of diverse ways of being (Wood, 2017). As Peers et al. (2012) argued, crip practice is “constituted in and through sustaining ableism” (p. 151), making it imperative to develop alternative frameworks for thinking, living, and relating. In this regard, Butler’s (2004) call “to imagine ourselves and others otherwise” (p. 29) becomes central to Crip theory’s world-making agenda. This framework seeks to achieve alternative and affirming outcomes for people with lived experiences of disability by centring and valuing the opportunities embedded in diverse ways of living (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2015).

Importantly, Crip theory introduces concepts such as *crip time*, which resists normative temporalities based on productivity, linear progression, and efficiency (McRuer, 2017). Dominant frameworks, particularly those shaped by medical and neoliberal logics, often position disability as a static condition, measured and managed through diagnostic timelines and standardised developmental milestones. Within such frameworks, people with disabilities are expected either to “overcome” limitations within fixed timeframes or to remain indefinitely outside normative social participation. Crip time challenges these assumptions by offering a flexible, non-linear, and responsive understanding of time, one that accommodates diverse bodily rhythms, cognitive styles, and relational tempos (Price, 2011). As Kafer (2013) noted, it calls into question whose timeframes are valued and whose temporalities are erased in dominant discourses. Rather than treating delay, pause, or asynchrony as deficits, crip time reframes them as valid and frequently necessary ways of being.

Within the context of this research, CDS and Crip theory together provide an integrated framework for understanding how disability operates, not as a limitation but as a source of epistemological, creative, and cultural potential. CDS offers a broad socio-political critique of how disability is constructed through institutional, cultural, and material barriers. Crip theory extends this foundation by challenging normative assumptions about embodiment, productivity, and temporality, offering alternative ways of understanding bodily difference and lived experience. Together, these perspectives reposition disability as a dynamic and generative force that reshapes how we understand identity, knowledge, and artistic practice.

This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study, which investigates how artists with visual impairment engage in multisensory and collaborative artistic practices that challenge dominant visual and temporal norms. These artists do not conform to preordained aesthetic timelines or able-bodied expectations of artistic productivity. Instead, the artists generate alternative temporal logics through embodied experimentation, sensory negotiation, and co-creative process. Crip theory thus contributes a critical lens through which to examine the temporal, affective, and cultural dimensions of disability-led creative practice while supporting a broader call to reimagine inclusive futures rooted in temporal justice and epistemic plurality.

2.3 Visual Impairment and Creative Art Practice

2.3.1 Introduction

Globally, more than 2.2 billion people have lived experience of visual impairment (World Health Organization, 2023). This population encompasses individuals with a near or distance vision impairment, including congenital blindness, acquired low vision, and diverse experiences of visual loss.

According to definitions by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO), visual impairment refers to the impact of ocular conditions on the visual system and its function (World Health Organization, 2019). Within the framework of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), *impairment* refers to problems in an individual's body functions or structures caused by a health condition (Cozzi et al., 2021). However, this biomedical classification model frequently overlooks how people with visual impairment adapt and develop creative strategies within different sociocultural contexts.

In artistic and cultural practices, the multisensory experiences of people with visual impairment challenge the long-standing dominance of ocularcentrism. Ocularcentrism refers to a sensory epistemology prevalent in Western culture, which privileges vision over other senses (Chandler & Munday, 2020; Devorah, 2017). The privileging of vision not only marginalises the participation of other sensory modalities but also profoundly shapes the mechanisms through which artistic value, legitimacy, and intelligibility are defined (Cachia, 2023). Within this framework, the creative practices of the artists with visual impairment function both as a form of resistance and as an act of reconstruction. Non-visual perception among artists with visual impairment is not merely a personal experience but exists in tension with broader structures of social exclusion. This tension raises critical questions within this research: How do artists with visual impairment navigate and even subvert visual-centric creative traditions? In what ways do non-visual sensory modalities redefine artistic practice? How can ocularcentrism be critically examined while simultaneously expanding the material and sensory dimensions of artistic expression?

Visual impairment is neither a singular nor a static experience; rather, it constitutes a diverse spectrum of perceptual adaptations and sensory compensatory strategies. For example, individuals with congenital blindness often develop heightened tactile or auditory spatial awareness (Schinazi et al., 2016) while people with residual visual memory frequently describe experiences of *phantom vision* or symbolic visual reconstructions (Petty, 2021). The artists with visual impairment bring experiences across various sensory dimensions, including both visual and non-visual modalities. This diversity challenges the long-held assumption that art should inherently rely on vision, prompting new conceptualisations of creativity.

Similarly, Kleege (2017) critiqued the privileging of vision in literary and artistic canons, referring to it as the *tyranny of the visual*. She argued that art should not be confined to the visual domain but should instead explore a broader multisensory experience. Godin (2021), in the book *There plant eyes: A personal and cultural history of blindness*, advances a perspective consistent with the concept of sensory diversity in contemporary Disability Studies, suggesting that losing sight is not a deprivation of perception but, rather, a restructuring of one's world. These examples suggest that art by visually impaired individuals expands sensory expression beyond traditional paradigms rather than merely substituting visual experience.

The following section critically examines the limitations of ocularcentrism and explores how visual impairment both influences and redefines artistic capability. By centring the perspectives and practices of the artists with visual impairment, it interrogates how art can move beyond the hegemony of vision towards a more inclusive, multisensory future.

2.3.2 Challenging Ocularcentrism

A. Rethinking Vision in Perception. Vision, long regarded as the most dominant and complex of the human senses (Hutmacher, 2019), has historically been granted epistemological privilege in Western philosophy and aesthetics. From classical Greek thought to the scientific developments of the Enlightenment, vision became associated with truth, rationality, and objectivity, thereby shaping prevailing cultural and artistic norms (Hutmacher, 2019; Kavanagh, 2014). This visual dominance, termed *ocularcentrism* by Jay (2014), has contributed to the marginalisation of other sensory modalities, particularly within the domains of art and perception. Such privileging has constructed a hierarchical sensory order that frequently excludes non-visual ways of knowing and engaging with the world (Classen, 2023). While historically contingent, these visual norms continue to dominate both critical theory and artistic evaluation (Geddes, 2020). However, contemporary scholarship increasingly challenges this sensory hierarchy.

Notably, this critique is not aimed at reversing the sensory hierarchy but, rather, at decentring vision to make space for embodied and multisensory ways of knowing. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological framework offers a critical intervention in this regard. In the book *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), Merleau-Ponty emphasised that perception is fundamentally an embodied, relational, contextual experience dependent on the body's holistic engagement with the world. This position destabilises the notion of vision as an independent, objective mechanism and instead situates it within an integrated sensory system. Ingold (2021b) further develops this perspective by arguing that the dominance of vision does not stem from the sense itself, but from the ways in which modern culture has constructed vision as a tool for extracting and categorising information. Vision does not

inherently objectify the world; rather, it is the constructed dominance of vision within modern epistemology that enforces this reduction (Ingold, 2021a). Therefore, critiques of ocularcentrism do not aim to reject vision altogether but challenge the epistemological role it has been assigned.

This perspective informs David MacDougall's concept of embodied seeing in visual anthropology. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, MacDougall (1997) argued that visual imagery is not merely optical data but can evoke bodily resonance, triggering tactile and emotional responses in viewers. The sensory complexity of visual engagement is thereby emphasised, suggesting that the boundaries between seeing, touching, and other senses (such as smell or proprioception) are not clearly delineated (Paterson, 2020). Such an understanding opens up space for rethinking perception as a multisensory experience.

However, in exploring non-visual senses and their interrelations, many discussions tend to frame these modalities through the lens of sensory substitution, that is, touch, hearing, or proprioception are frequently conceptualised as compensatory mechanisms that replace vision (Eagleman & Perrotta, 2023; Macpherson, 2018). While sensory substitution may appear inclusive, it subtly reinforces the normative assumption that vision is the default or ideal mode of perception. As Loomis et al. (2018) argued, such interpretations define non-visual experience primarily in relation to the absence of vision, rather than acknowledging the cognitive and creative autonomy of other sensory modalities. The perspective of sensory substitution risks perpetuating ocular-centric hierarchies. From the standpoint of CDS, the understanding of sensory substitution imposes a deficit-based framework that overlooks how people with visual impairment develop distinct, embodied perceptual systems, not as replacements but as valid and generative modes of engaging with the world

(Paterson, 2022). Within such a framework of sensory reconfiguration, non-visual senses hold equal epistemological and aesthetic status to vision.

This conceptual shift from sensory substitution to sensory reconfiguration not only reframes non-visual perception as autonomous and generative but also lays the groundwork for rethinking artistic creation through inclusive, multisensory modalities, an issue further explored in the next section.

B. Multisensory Approaches and the Limitations of Visual Methods. Sarah Pink's sensory ethnography presents a critical challenge to the dominance of visual methods in both art and ethnographic research. However, her redefinition of photography and video as media for multisensory engagement still operates largely within a visual framework (Pink, 2015a). Although she emphasises that visual practices are intertwined with touch, sound, smell, and bodily movement, these multisensory engagements often remain mediated by visual representation and the researcher's own sensory assumptions, such as "multi-sensory video tours" (Pink, 2015a, p. 6) and "walking with video" (Pink, 2007, p. 240).

The documentary *Leviathan* (Wahlberg, 2014), produced by the Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL) at Harvard University, stands as a representative example of sensory ethnography. While the film blends sensory anthropology with experimental aesthetics to create immersive experiences, its ethnographic method, particularly the use of synchronised GoPro cameras and multi-directional microphones mounted on bodies, nets, and boats, foregrounds visceral, non-narrative data collection that privileges affect over explanation (Kara & Thain, 2015). Through this technique, *Leviathan* constructs a chaotic and immersive soundscape in which the ocean, machinery, and human labour

blend into a dynamic sonic environment. However, this immersive approach raises critical questions about sensory accessibility. The reliance on extreme visual and auditory immersion may marginalise audiences, particularly people with sensory impairments, by reinforcing an ocular-centric and audio-centric aesthetic. From a CDS perspective, such immersion, while innovative, risks re-inscribing sensory hierarchies under the guise of inclusivity.

The method of tracking subjects with handheld or body-mounted cameras to document their sensory engagement with the environment has inherent limitations (Howes et al., 2015). A fundamental assumption underlying such discussions is that both participants and researchers share the same perceptual abilities. This approach often relies on the researcher's own sensory experience as the basis for studying and interpreting others' perceptions. However, when perceptual modalities between the observer and the observed diverge, such as in the case of people with significant sensory differences, like people with visual impairment, visually-dominated documentation methods may fail to capture the richness of non-visual sensory worlds. Some sensory perceptions, such as smell or texture, are highly subjective and resist precise verbal articulation, which may lead to their underrepresentation in research data or visual documentation (Pink, 2020). As a result, for the people with visual impairment, such methods may inadvertently reinforce vision-centred sensory hierarchies rather than genuinely challenge them.

These limitations underscore the urgent need to move beyond merely expanding the scope of visual methodologies and towards a deeper reconfiguration of how sensory knowledge is conceptualised and practised. In contrast to frameworks that treat non-visual modalities as supplementary or compensatory, a de-ocular-centric perspective positions touch, sound,

proprioception, and spatial awareness as primary modes of engagement, with generative potential both creatively and epistemologically. The following section explores how non-visual artistic practices not only resist visual dominance but also generate alternative aesthetic logics and embodied ways of knowing, particularly when viewed through the lens of visual impairment.

C. De-ocularcentrism and the Creative Potential of Non-visual Art Practice. Building on the critique of ocularcentrism in the previous section, this part focuses on how visual impairment challenges and reshapes perceptual experiences in artistic practice while also exploring the significance of non-visual senses in contemporary art from the perspective of artists with visual impairment.

Traditional Western art theory has long privileged vision as the primary conduit for artistic engagement, a view rooted in Enlightenment ideals that equated seeing with knowing and artistic appreciation with optical mastery (Baldessarelli et al., 2022; Bunch, 2021). This visual primacy has shaped not only the modes of artistic production but also the processes of aesthetic judgement and reception, frequently marginalising non-visual modes of engagement. From the perspective of CDS, this visual norm is not neutral but constitutes a form of sensory hegemony, one that renders non-visual artistic practices either invisible or frames them as compensatory deviations from visual norms.

However, the creative practices created by artists with visual impairment fundamentally challenge this logic. These practices are not mere substitutes for “visual absence” but, rather, offer unique, embodied, and multisensory ways of engaging with the world. They are not constructed through the lens of “visual loss”, but instead reassert the epistemological validity and aesthetic

generativity of touch, sound, proprioception, and spatial awareness (Cuppone et al., 2018; Spence, 2022).

Disability aesthetics offer a critical framework for understanding these works of art, emphasising the value of embodied difference and redefining aesthetic experience through the lens of disability (Kleege, 2017; Li et al., 2023). Siebers (2010) defined disability aesthetics as a “critical concept that seeks to emphasise the presence of disability in the tradition of aesthetic representation” (p. 64). This perspective challenges normative aesthetic frameworks that centre the healthy body as the standard of beauty and coherence.

Expanding upon the principles of disability aesthetics, disability art refers to artistic works created by artists with disability that foreground disability as a lived experience and as a source of creative expression (Kuppers, 2014). As a central component of disability culture, disability art reflects shared histories, values, humour, language, and aesthetic forms rooted in embodied difference and social resistance (Hevey, 2022). Rather than depicting disability merely as a theme or subject matter, disability art positions disability as integral to the process, form, and intention of artistic creation (Cachia, 2023). Sandahl (2018) further elaborated that disability art challenges dominant aesthetic conventions, centres access as a generative artistic strategy, and challenges normative assumptions embedded in artistic practice and audience interpretation.

In line with these theoretical perspectives, this research adopts the term *disability art* to foreground the artistic agency, authorship, and sensory expertise of artists with visual impairment. Non-visual and multisensory creative practices informed by embodied difference actively challenge dominant paradigms of perception, artistic production, and cultural inclusion. Rather than seeking to

eliminate vision, the principle of de-ocularcentrism challenges its structural dominance and opens conceptual space for other sensory modalities, such as touch, sound, and proprioception, to shape artistic meaning. This generative potential is exemplified in non-visual art practices.

To further illustrate how blindness informs artistic innovation, a growing body of disability-led artistic discourse explores the relationship between non-visual perception and creative process. For instance, Thompson and Warne (2018) sought to understand the relationship between blindness and art and coined the term *blindness art*. This term signifies a contrast with *visual art* while establishing a symbiotic relationship with it. Dubiel (2022) suggested that the essence of this concept lies in exploring the creative potential of persons considered blind, offering new perspectives on the relationships between blindness, creativity, expressions of emotions, and inclusivity. One of the crucial elements of blindness art is the utilisation of accessible tools, including audio descriptions, tactile tours, and experiences within blind culture, to support the artists with visual impairment in exploring and expressing creative capacities. Kleege (2017) observed that blind artists frequently employ audio descriptions or tactile elements as the artistic medium. For instance, Taylor (2017) reflects deeply on creativity, considering it an intrinsic aspect of the disability experience that not only offers people with disability unique avenues for engaging with the world but also challenges able audiences to reconsider their own assumptions about creativity, embodiment, and artistic value.

Another example is non-visual photography, which expands the definition of photographic practice beyond the visual domain. Non-visual photographers do not focus on capturing visual imagery; instead, the works are constructed through auditory cues, tactile memory, spatial orientation, and emotional resonance (McCulloh, 2013). The documentary *Shot in the dark* (Amann, 2016) portrays the

creative processes of three blind photographers, namely Pete Eckert, Sonia Soberats, and Bruce Hall, who do not substitute for sight but reconstruct perception through non-visual means. The artists imaginatively engage with light, sound, and heat or cold, prompting viewers to rethink the very nature of “seeing”.

Similarly, the *Seeing with photography collective* (2025) adopts a dialogical approach, in which both sighted and visual impaired participants co-create images in complete darkness, painting with light using flashlights directly onto film (Fairey & Orton, 2019). This method challenges conventional assumptions about authorship, creative intention, and visual control, foregrounding co-presence and sensory negotiation. Rather than privileging the visual as the dominant mode of meaning-making, the process involves a dynamic reconfiguration of sensory roles and responsibilities between collaborators. As Chmielecki (2021) argued, traditional photographic models have long been governed by ocular-centric ideologies that reduce perception to vision and representation to optical clarity. In contrast, non-visual photographic practices subvert this logic by introducing embodied, tactile, and auditory modalities, requiring a continuous negotiation of sensory authority and interpretive frameworks.

Despite the high degree of innovation in these artistic practices, non-visual art is still frequently marginalised within dominant art discourses or evaluated through the lens of “lack”, with its value often measured against visual norms. Audiences are frequently surprised or offer patronising praise upon learning that certain artworks were created by blind artists, revealing deeply ingrained assumptions about perceptual ability and artistic value (Cachia, 2023; Szubielska, 2018). Such reactions expose a broader issue: positioning artists with disability in narratives of overcoming

adversity or inspiration tends to obscure the active contributions to knowledge production and aesthetic discourse (Walters, 2023). This implicit sympathy reproduces a subtle form of inequality. By contrast, non-visual art should be recognised as an autonomous artistic paradigm, one that generates new aesthetic logics and challenges the visual foundations of art theory.

Furthermore, blindness does not equate to a lack of perception. For instance, British anthropologist Petty (2021) conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the South Downs region of southern England, where she volunteered as a sighted guide for people with visual impairment. In the project, she observed that her visually impaired companions are capable of vividly describing complex visual and spatial experiences through imagination, memory, or environmental cues. Similarly, Hull's book *Touching the rock: The experience of blindness* (1992), documented his sensory reconfiguration during a state of deep blindness, highlighting heightened sensitivity to sound, space, and environmental conditions. These cases demonstrate that visual impairment is not a deficit in perception but, rather, a different mode of embodied engagement with the world. Neuroscientific research supports this view, suggesting that in the absence of vision, the cerebral cortex may undergo functional reorganisation, leading to increased sensitivity in other senses such as hearing and touch (Sacks, 2021).

In summary, the artistic practices of people with visual impairment not only challenge the dominance of vision but also offer generative alternatives grounded in multisensory experience. In this context, de-ocularcentrism does not imply the rejection of vision but, rather, a reconfiguration of perception, that enables new forms of knowledge, creativity, and participation. The following section builds on this perspective by examining how embodied experiences shape creative practices beyond visual paradigms.

2.3.3 Embodied Perspectives in Creative Practice

Building on the previous discussion of CDS and Crip theory, this section critically examines creative practice through the lens of embodiment, with a particular focus on the experiences of artists with visual impairment. Rather than treating embodiment as a universalised theoretical lens, the section foregrounds how embodied perception is generated through differentiated sensory experiences, and how such differences shape the affordances within artistic environments. While dominant theories of perception and creativity frequently presume a normative, sighted body, this analysis challenges such assumptions by situating embodiment within the context of embodied difference, spatial interaction, and sensory diversity.

The section unfolds in two parts. The first part outlines how embodied perception is dynamically constituted through the interaction between bodily capacities and environmental affordances, drawing primarily on phenomenological theory. The second part focuses on the specific context of disability arts, examining how artists with visual impairment develop distinctive sensory and spatial modalities of engagement through creative practice. Through this analysis, the section critiques reductive notions of sensory substitution or compensation and instead proposes a model of embodiment grounded in diversity, negotiation, and spatial agency. It further highlights the generative roles of habit and place-making in constructing alternative perceptual pathways, artistic methods, and collaborative practices.

This section invites a rethinking of creativity as a multisensory, situated, and relational process. By integrating critical perspectives from Disability Studies, phenomenology, and art practice, it aims

to move beyond normative frameworks, expanding conceptualisations of embodiment and opening space for pluralistic modes of artistic knowledge production.

A. Theoretical Foundation of Embodied Perception and Affordance. Embodiment emphasises the significance of first-person experience, highlighting the central role of lived experience in shaping perception (Monson, 2018). Heffernan (2017) argued that the distinction between the objective body and the lived body is that the former is understood through empirical observation in natural sciences, such as physiology, whereas the latter is accessed through introspective experience. Merleau-Ponty (2012) further introduced the concept of “being-in-the-world” (p. 48), emphasising the body’s active role in its interaction with the environment. However, the disability scholar Reynolds (2018) has pointed out that this theoretical tradition is frequently based on “an able-bodied simulation” (p. 421), which overlooks the diversity and complexity of non-normative embodied experiences.

This critique highlights a gap in classical phenomenological accounts of embodiment, which tend to universalise bodily perception while neglecting the relational, variable, and often disabled realities of how bodies engage with the world. To address this limitation, ecological psychology, particularly Gibson’s (2015) theory of direct perception, offers a more dynamic, contextually grounded view of how bodies perceive and act in real environments. Rather than treating perception as a process of internal representation, Gibson (2015) argued that individuals directly perceive affordances, meaning the possibilities for action that the environment offers in relation to bodily capacities. Crucially, affordances are not fixed nor singular but are dynamic and context-dependent (Chemero, 2018). For instance, a chair may afford sitting to an adult but climbing to a child. These affordances

emerge through the interplay between bodily ability, intention, and the sensory conditions of the environment.

Although Gibson's theory aims to decentre visual dominance, the practical application often remains biased towards vision, particularly in the perception of space and objects (Chemero, 2018). This tendency becomes particularly limiting when applied to the creative practices of artists with visual impairment, since the perception and negotiation of affordances in such contexts are frequently structured through non-visual sensory modalities. For instance, people with visual impairment may determine spatial boundaries through echolocation, sense direction via changes in airflow, or distinguish materials through texture, temperature, and auditory cues (Bakir et al., 2022). These practices indicate that affordances are not perceived through a singular dominant sense but, rather, emerge from a multisensory interplay grounded in embodied difference.

Building on this view, Shapiro (2019) elaborated perception as an enactive and embodied process, realised through the interaction of sensorimotor activity and continuous perceptual feedback. Perception is not a passive extraction of environmental information but unfolds dynamically through the ongoing interplay between bodily movement and sensory engagement (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2020). This cyclical relationship is particularly pronounced in artistic practice, where artists display an embodied rhythm of exploration, resistance, and adaptation through their interaction with materials and spatial awareness.

Ingold (2021b) further expanded this theoretical framework by linking intersensoriality, the interweaving and co-constitution of sensory modalities in shaping perception, with interspatiality, a concept describing how spatial experience emerges not from a static visual field but from embodied

movement, relational positioning, and sensory interaction. Drawing on anthropological fieldwork and phenomenological theory, Ingold argued that perception is inherently multimodal. People do not merely see, hear, or touch in isolation but experience the world through an integrated sensory field shaped by motion and engagement. He contends that space is not a neutral container but a medium that comes into being through the body's tactile, auditory, and kinaesthetic relations with its surroundings.

This perspective is particularly valuable for the present study, which explores disability arts. For the artists with visual impairment, spatial awareness and creative expression are constructed through touch, sound, proprioception, and memory, rather than vision. By adopting Ingold's framework, the study avoids framing non-visual modalities as compensatory or secondary and, instead, positions them as generative forces in artistic meaning-making. Intersensoriality and interspatiality thus offer a critical vocabulary for understanding how non-visual art practices reshape dominant assumptions about perception, embodiment, and aesthetic production in contemporary disability arts.

Such critiques of vision-centric aesthetics and normative perceptual assumptions necessitate a reframing of affordance theory within disability art or disability aesthetic. In this reconceptualisation, affordances are not merely objective possibilities embedded in the physical environment but are understood as socially and culturally mediated experiences that arise through the interaction of diverse bodies with their sensory, social, and spatial contexts. For example, a white fabric installation may evoke mourning in East Asian contexts yet connote celebration in Western settings (Pastoureau, 2017). Similarly, non-visual engagement, such as listening to a sculpture's resonance or touching a

textile surface, may reveal affective and interpretive dimensions typically constrained by visual-centric perceptual frameworks.

Therefore, it becomes important to explore whether and how artists with visual impairment develop a reconfigurative logic of artistic perception, one that challenges the reduction of non-visual senses to mere substitutes for vision. Instead, creative practices by artists with visual impairment have the potential to affirm the generative capacity of non-visual affordances in shaping the artistic process. In the absence of visual cues, perceiving affordances requires heightened sensitivity to bodily signals, spatial acoustics, and tactile feedback, giving rise to fundamentally different modes of spatial reasoning and aesthetic interpretation.

This reconfigured logic of perception not only transforms the process of artistic creation but also profoundly influences how artists construct their relationship with the environment. Specifically, artists with visual impairment, through embodied participation and sensory interaction, develop a generative mode of spatial experience referred to as place-making. In this context, place-making refers to the process of constructing spatial meaning through sensory engagement, social interaction, and embodied difference (Ellery et al., 2021), serving as a crucial strategy through which artists navigate and transform the creative environments. Rather than a fixed or static geographical location, place is conceived as a space gradually generated through the layering of sensory inputs and embodied involvement (Ingold, 2021a). As individuals move and navigate through an environment, multiple sensory experiences, such as temperature, lighting, and scent, collectively shape their understanding of place (Velasco & Obrist, 2021).

This perspective challenges traditional vision-centred spatial theories, such as map-based spatial representations, that conceptualise space as a fixed, objective grid to be navigated visually from a detached, top-down perspective (Meneghetti & Pazzaglia, 2021). In the process of place-making, participants progressively internalise specific environments as familiar spaces through sensory engagement with environmental elements and interaction with materials during artistic creation. This dynamic transformation also exemplifies the mechanism through which perceptual habits are formed. Through this dynamic and often simultaneous interplay between perception and action, a sense of place becomes embedded in embodied experience. Rather than unfolding in a strict sequence, perception and action inform and reshape each other continuously, gradually forming habitual perceptual orientations that underpin creative practice. These patterns are not merely functional adaptations but reflect a generative integration of body, environment, and sensory awareness.

Such embodied and context-specific perceptual pathways offer a critical lens for rethinking creativity. Rather than beginning from conventional assumptions that prioritise visual accuracy or the faithful reproduction of appearances, this alternative framework, grounded in embodied diversity and sensory relationality, centres multisensory interpretation, affective resonance, and performative interaction.

In particular, affective resonance has been theorised as a form of embodied, intersubjective alignment through which affective intensities are transmitted between bodies (Pors, 2018). This concept foregrounds how affect emerges relationally between artists, audiences, and environments, and becomes a generative force in meaning-making. Within the context of non-visual creative

practices, affective resonance helps explain how affect is communicated and felt through bodily movement, tactile contact, or auditory cues rather than visual recognition alone. This aligns with the experiences of the participating artists in this research, whose practices revealed how affect travels through non-visual modalities, producing shared sensorial and affective understanding.

Building on this, affective multisensory memory can be understood as the integration of past sensory experiences, such as tactile, auditory, olfactory, or residual visual impressions, with their associated affective meanings, which can be reactivated and drawn upon in the course of creative practice (Quak et al., 2015). In this process, memory, embodied imagination, and sensory experience are dynamically interwoven, extending the scope of affective resonance from immediate intersubjective exchange to the temporal strata of sensory history, and revealing how creative expression emerges through the conjoint influence of present perception and embodied recollection. Within a phenomenological framework, memory is conceived as a living, embodied process in which sensory-affective experiences are continuously re-lived, reinterpreted, and integrated into the immediacy of current perception (Teroni, 2017). In this sense, imagination is not merely the passive reproduction of past sensory impressions but an active, embodied capacity to engage with imaginal presences as autonomous worlds, varying, transforming, and projecting sensory and affective experiences beyond their original context while maintaining a reflexive awareness of their alterity (Bosnak, 2003; van Dijk & Rietveld, 2025). Merleau-Ponty (2012) situated imagination within the experience of the body-in-the-world, emphasising its reliance on embodied memory, motor intentionality, and perceptual openness to the world.

For artists with visual impairment, such memories often manifest in hybrid forms, composed of residual visual imagery, tactile textures, and auditory impressions, thereby forming a perceptual archive that shapes imaginative projection and guides aesthetic judgement (Uboldi et al., 2025). From a phenomenological perspective, memory and imagination are not discrete mental operations: memory provides the sensory and affective material for imagination, while imagination transforms, reorganises, and recontextualises these experiences to imbue them with new meanings (Rivadulla-Duró, 2024). This reciprocal interaction between memory and imagination enables past multisensory experiences to be reactivated in present creative practice and extended into yet-unlived situations.

In the context of non-visual artistic creation, this perspective reconceptualises imagination as a generative mode of perception, one that does not depend on visual representation but instead integrates tactile, auditory, olfactory, and residual visual traces into new sensory configurations. Through such multisensory operations, artists with visual impairment are able to construct symbolic forms, aesthetic compositions, and affective atmospheres that challenge ocular-centric paradigms and expand the epistemological boundaries of art. This creative process, grounded in affective multisensory memory and generative imagination, not only demonstrates the diversity of perception but also offers a theoretical pathway for understanding artistic engagement beyond visually-dominant frameworks. In doing so, perception is reinterpreted as a dynamic process shaped by embodied difference and non-visual sensory modalities.

This reconceptualisation challenges the dominant assumptions embedded in both phenomenological (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2020; Merleau-Ponty, 2012) and ecological theories of perception (Gibson, 2015; Turvey, 2018), and instead advocates for a perceptual model shaped by

bodily variation and non-visual sensory modalities. This shift not only redefines how artistic engagement occurs but also challenges dominant frameworks that have historically marginalised people with disability as passive subjects rather than legitimate producers of sensory and aesthetic knowledge (Ray & Sibara, 2017). Within this reconfiguration, people with visual impairment are no longer perceived as a “deviation” from the normative ideal but recognised as an active generator of aesthetic and epistemological innovation.

While non-visual perception is frequently associated with external sensory inputs, such as touch, sound, or smell, recent discussions in phenomenology and Disability Studies have begun to emphasise the internal dimensions of embodied experience. These internal cues, which include muscle tension, breath rhythm, and gut sensations, contribute to the body’s felt sense of orientation and meaning-making. These cues can be described as visceral feeling, which is a form of perception beyond tactile, auditory, and proprioceptive. For instance, people frequently reported a visceral sense of alignment or rightness when encountering certain artworks, an affective and embodied response that preceded conceptual interpretation (Steinmetz et al., 2018).

Such responses reflect a form of visceral feeling, a pre-reflective, embodied resonance with the work that arises not from visual analysis or conceptual interpretation but from within the body itself. This aligns with the account of visceral states by Risen and Critcher (2011), who described them as internal, attention-consuming experiences and “phenomenologically consuming bodily states” (p. 777). This state echoes Merleau-Ponty’s (2012) notion of bodily intentionality, whereby the body knows before the mind articulates.

Far from being passive, these visceral experiences actively shape perception, attuning individuals to environmental conditions and artistic materials. For artists working without visual input, these visceral cues function as primary guides for navigating space, expressing emotion, and making creative decisions. They signal discomfort, resonance, or spatial tension through what Merleau-Ponty (2012) identified as the general instrument of our comprehension of the world.

B. Embodiment in Disability Arts Practice. Building on a critique of the “able-bodied” model presupposed in traditional phenomenology and embodied cognition, this section explores how embodied difference exposes and reconstructs the institutional structures of perception and action in artistic practice. Embodied difference not only reflects the fluidity and diversity of body–environment relations but also questions the dominance of perceptual norms centred on visual capacity, motor control, and spatial mastery in regimes of knowledge production and aesthetic evaluation (Dickel, 2022; Paterson, 2021).

For artists with visual impairment, perception is never a static reproduction of the world. Instead, perception is a dynamic construction grounded in haptic, auditory, proprioceptive, and kinaesthetic modalities in the absence of visual cues (Shapiro, 2019). For example, haptic perception may involve reading surface textures through the hands, while auditory cues, such as echoes or changes in sound density, help delineate space. Proprioception, the sense of the body’s position and movement, allows artists to track limb orientation or gestures during dance or sculpture-making without needing to see them. Kinaesthetic awareness similarly supports movement through space by integrating muscle and joint feedback. Such non-visual perception is not a mere compensatory mechanism but a situated strategy shaped by bodily specificity and environmental interaction.

This strategy destabilises the visual-centric hierarchy of the senses and challenges the privileging of visual immediacy and perceptual wholeness that dominate artistic discourse (Pitts-Taylor, 2016). A strong example can be found in *Project ReVision* (Re•Vision Centre for Art and Social Justice, n.d.), in which Rice et al. (2017) curated a series of narrative digital short movies co-created by artists with disability and researchers. These works contest dominant narratives that frame disability through the lens of correction or overcoming, by centring the lived experience and affirming bodily difference as a site of temporal and epistemic creativity.

For instance, in *Shift*, Eliza Chandler reframes disability not as a problem to be solved but as a cultural identity and source of pride, inviting audiences to imagine what might be gained by embracing, rather than erasing, disability. Her narrative traces a shift “from a space of shame to pride”, foregrounding the emotional and social complexities of disabled embodiment (Rice et al., 2015, p. 517). Similarly, *Knitting*, by Elisabeth Harrison resists biomedical framings of depression by highlighting tactile practice as a method of self-understanding and resistance, prompting viewers to question mental health paradigms centred on cure or compliance (Rice et al., 2015).

Crucially, this sensory and embodied difference is not a static condition but is continuously generated through the formation of habits in the interaction between creative actions and the environment. Habit, in this sense, is not a neutral adaptation but a socially and culturally mediated structure that reinforces, excludes, or reconfigures specific sensory experiences (Kull, 2016; Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Artists with visual impairment do not simply adjust to an able-bodied world. Instead, distinct spatial tactics and bodily language emerge through ongoing practice. These include edge detection through touch (Memeo et al., 2023), echolocation for spatial orientation (Andrade et al.,

2021; Bujacz et al., 2024), and material-based muscle memory (Friedman, 2017). These sensory-motor strategies are not innate capacities but relational achievements emerging from the negotiation between embodied difference and social context.

However, as Mikkola et al. (2017) and Cachia (2023) caution, discourses on embodied difference risk falling into essentialist traps, treating disability as a fixed and pre-given category while ignoring the cultural and institutional processes that shape it. Crip theory offers a critical intervention, reframing disability as a relational and situated condition negotiated within normative structures (Martino & Schormans, 2020). This perspective calls for a critical re-examination of visual-centric frameworks of artistic evaluation, particularly how they marginalise embodied difference by excluding non-visual experiences as deviations from normative modes of creation.

The formation of habits, moreover, is not merely the natural accumulation of individual experience, which is deeply shaped by structural norms, cultural expectations, and spatial regimes (Bourdieu, 2017). As CDS argue, many so-called habits are in fact the internalisation of normative functional capacities (Santana et al., 2024), a phenomenon particularly visible in accessibility design, educational frameworks, and curatorial practices. When artistic spaces prioritise visual fluency and unrestricted movement, the perceptual modes of artists with disability are read as limitations rather than as valid and generative aesthetic logics. Therefore, a genuinely inclusive space should not be limited to the adaptation of physical structures; rather, it should involve a restructuring of perceptual frameworks to redefine modes of participation, recognising and supporting the legitimacy of diverse sensory pathways (Solvang, 2018).

Artistic creation by people with visual impairment unfolds within such structural tensions, where specific sensorimotor relationships with materials, spatial configurations, and social interactions are continuously developed. The resulting sense of place is not a product of passive adaptation but, rather, emerges through iterative processes of sensory engagement and memory construction, revealing the generative mechanisms of embodied knowledge. Creative agency in this context is not a replication or transcendence of normative perceptual pathways but a process of inventing perceptual strategies through co-constitution with the environment, constituting a critical response to dominant logics of sensory primacy (Manning, 2020).

Therefore, embodied difference and the formation of habit not only reveal the diversity of bodily experiences but also serve as critical entry points into art criticism, perceptual theory, and the politics of space. This perspective compels a reconsideration: when bodily variation intersects with environmental affordance, should artistic creation be redefined as a process of perceptual renegotiation? And is the capacity for creation itself embedded within imaginaries of normalcy, that is, the socially constructed expectations of what bodies should be able to do, see, or sense? As Titchkosky (2020) argued such imaginaries shape not only public discourse but also institutional and aesthetic norms that marginalise disability through assumptions of deviance or lack. The following section will further explore this question by focusing on how perceptual difference reshapes collaborative art practices and prompts a rethinking of aesthetic frameworks.

2.3.4 Collaborative Artistic Practice and Reflexive Co-creation

A. Embodied Difference and Sensory Place-making. In collaborative artistic practice, the dynamic formation of embodied habits is evident not only in the act of creation but also in the

construction of the artist's identity. For instance, the artists with visual impairment may adjust their creative strategies based on non-visual sensory inputs, such as tactile feedback, auditory cues, and proprioceptive awareness. However, their non-visually impaired collaborators might rely more on visual input to guide the actions. The multisensory collaborative approach fosters an ongoing exchange and mutual adjustment of sensory experiences and perceptual modes. As a result, a new place of artistic co-creation emerges. Within this shared domain, diverse sensory approaches intersect, and embodied differences generate unique modes of participation and artistic expression.

This collaborative and multisensory artistic practice, grounded in differential perception and embodied habit, offers a critical pathway for rethinking the concept of place-making. Within conventional art theory and exhibition practice, creative space is treated as a neutral container or a vessel for formal composition, reflecting a normatively visual aesthetic assumption (Schorch et al., 2018). However, from the perspective of embodied experience, space is not a passive backdrop but an active, processual field where perceptual experiences are activated and bodily knowledge is generated (Pink et al., 2017). In this context, the body is not a mere adapter to environmental constraints but an active participant that interacts with space through sensory exploration, movement trajectories, and tactile-material feedback. Through this ongoing process, the body continuously generates new meanings and possibilities for action (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2020).

These insights not only reshape how creative space is understood during the artistic process but also have important implications for exhibition design and curatorial practices. Conventional exhibition environments, characterised by white walls, minimalist layouts, and controlled lighting, reflect visual-centric modes of engagement that often marginalise other sensory modalities (Bedford,

2014). From the perspective of disability arts and embodied difference, the ideology of spatial neutrality in the exhibition is increasingly subject to critique. As Juste (2023) argued, dominant curatorial conventions based on white cube aesthetics and visual clarity reinforce ocular normative expectations, thereby marginalising non-visual forms of engagement. Similarly, Austin et al. (2018) pointed out that traditional gallery layouts tend to prioritise distant visual contemplation while suppressing tactile, auditory, and kinaesthetic interactions. Within this context, artistic practices grounded in non-visual perception offer a critical intervention by foregrounding material presence, multisensory dialogue, and multidimensional audience participation.

Consequently, place-making should no longer be regarded as an abstract principle of spatial design but as a situated and negotiated process shaped through diverse modes of sensory participation. For artists with visual impairment, this resonates with what Pink (2015a) argued that sensory place-making involves the embodied experience of space through multisensory engagement, such as feeling air on the skin, sensing textures, and moving through places, highlighting the importance of rhythm, sound, airflow, and touch in the construction of place. This practice challenges the assumptions in spatial theory that equate orientation with visual mastery, instead opening a pathway to re-theorise spatial experience through the lens of sensory diversity and embodiment (Classen, 2017; Ingold, 2021b). Building on this, non-visual modalities, such as audition, touch, and proprioception, actively shape spatial understanding through rhythmic movement, material interaction, and sensory attunement. These modalities enable a reconfiguration of spatial experience that moves beyond visual dominance, foregrounding relational, dynamic, and embodied ways of engaging with the environment. As Ferrarini (2017) noted, multisensory practices do not merely adapt

to normative spatial conditions but actively construct psychological and virtual spaces grounded in embodied perception, spaces that reimagine both accessibility and aesthetic participation (Herssens & Heylighen, 2012).

While collaborative, multisensory artistic practices involving artists with visual impairment clearly demonstrate the generative potential of embodied difference and expose the normative assumptions embedded within dominant theories of place-making. Conventional conceptualisations often define place as a physically bounded and visually apprehensible environment (Till & Robinson, 2025), overlooking the multisensory, embodied, and contested dimensions that shape spatial experience.

Phenomenological scholars such as Hall and Wilton (2017), Courage et al. (2020), and Seamon (2023) have provided foundational insights into the relationship between body and place. However, many of these frameworks universalise bodily experience and offer limited attention to the influence of perceptual differences, particularly variations in sensory modalities and cognitive processing, on the construction of place. The presumption of a normative perceptual subject tends to obscure the varied sensory modes through which spatial understanding is constructed in disability contexts.

This conceptual limitation has been further addressed by Morrison (2022), who argued that institutional spatial practices frequently marginalise disabled experiences by presupposing standardised, able-bodied norms of access and perception. This insight is particularly relevant in collaborative art contexts, where the negotiation of place is not merely aesthetic but deeply relational and political. These dynamics prompt questions about who is recognised as a creator and whose sensory experience is valued in the production of artistic and spatial meaning.

Moreover, collaborative art projects involving artists with visual impairment do not simply “add” diverse perspectives to existing spatial paradigms; rather, the practices actively challenge and reconfigure the logic through which spatial meaning is constructed. The inclusion of non-visual perception is not a technical substitution but a systemic intervention into the temporal rhythms and perceptual structures of spatial institutions. This intervention reveals how dominant spatial logics exclude embodied difference and how supposedly “neutral” creative practices are structured by visual normativity. In this process, “place” ceases to be a passive container of meaning and becomes an embodied archive of sensory memory, lived experience, and environmental negotiation. It documents and generates ongoing political contestations over participation, accessibility, and creative agency while illuminating the power relations and generative reconfigurations among sensory modalities within collaborative practices.

Thus, embodied difference and sensory place-making emerge not only as critical entry points for challenging dominant spatial aesthetics but also as modes of resistance that unsettle normalised perceptual regimes. Within collaborative art practice, these challenges prompt a critical re-examination of the spatial dynamics of voice and representation, specifically, who is granted the authority to articulate meaning through space and who is structurally silenced or excluded. Inclusive space should be reconceptualised not as structural accommodation alone but as a relational, continuously negotiated, and perceptually diverse co-creative process. The next section explores how these negotiations unfold through reflexive practice in collaborative artistic contexts.

B. Reflexive Practice and Multisensory Engagement. In the context of collaborative artistic practice, reflexive practice is no longer understood as a solitary cognitive activity undertaken by an

individual artist after the act of creation. Rather, it emerges as an ongoing process generated through embodied difference and sensory interaction among multiple participants. Traditionally, Schön's (2016) concepts of *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* have been widely applied in professional creative fields, such as interactive installation design, to describe how practitioners adjust their actions during the creative process or engage in retrospective evaluation and enhancement. For instance, a designer might modify the placement of sensors or adjust the responsiveness of sound and light elements in real time based on users' embodied reactions (*reflection-in-action*) and later analyse audience feedback or behavioural patterns to refine the installation's accessibility and experiential flow (*reflection-on-action*). However, this framework implicitly assumes a visually oriented mode of engagement, whereby creators are presumed to adjust their behaviour through immediate visual observation (Tan et al., 2023).

This assumption is challenged in collaborative disability arts, particularly when visually impaired artists rely on non-visual modalities such as touch, hearing, and proprioception. In such contexts, reflection no longer follows a linear, instantaneous model of observation and adjustment. For example, when interacting with slowly responsive materials, such as deformable sculptural elements, the delay in tactile feedback challenges Schön's notion of immediate "on-the-spot" reflection (2016, p. 55), suggesting instead that reflection functions as a cross-sensory, temporally extended process of bodily negotiation.

Collaborative artistic practice constitutes a critical context for rethinking the mechanisms of reflection. In the interactions among artists with visual impairment, sighted designers, audiences, and curators, reflexivity is embedded in the manipulation of materials, bodily navigation, and the

negotiation of perception. For instance, in the development of interactive multimodal guides that incorporate relief models, soundscapes, and tactile-responsive elements, artists and audiences collaboratively reshape spatial and sensory experience (Cavazos Quero et al., 2021). In such contexts, reflection is not a purely cognitive process that follows action; rather, it emerges progressively through each instance of tactile engagement and sensory feedback, unfolding within embodied and interactive encounters.

In another example, graphic designer Rodgers (2016) collaborated with a high school student named India, who lost her sight at the age of four due to a brain tumour that affected the optic nerve. Through a process involving tactile exploration, memory, and co-authorship, the two produced a pair of books that reflect a bidirectional reflexive process: one was an autobiography narrating the lived experiences of the student while the other captured the designer's insights and reflections gained through the collaboration. This partnership not only facilitated an innovative collaborative process but also challenged the unidirectional power dynamics typically embedded in traditional models of reflection. Here, reflexivity is reconceived as a relational practice, wherein meaning-making pathways are continuously revised and restructured through dialogue grounded in embodied difference.

Moreover, Crip theory offers a valuable perspective for rethinking the temporal structures of reflection. McRuer (2018) discussed the concept of crip time as a critical response to the normative temporal logic of productivity, advocating for delay, asynchrony, and non-linearity as generative conditions for reflexive engagement. In this context, attunement emerges as a central concept for understanding how reflection unfolds through embodied co-presence and sensory responsiveness rather than through linear, outcome-driven processes. Ash and Gallacher (2015) defined attunement

as “the capacity to sense, amplify, and attend to difference” (p. 73), highlighting a methodological orientation that sensitises the researcher’s body to the micro-level variations in affect, materiality, and relational dynamics between human and nonhuman agents. Similarly, Jaramillo and Gaztambide-Fernández (2019) described attunement as a dynamic, embodied process of sensing and responding within relational spaces, where meaning emerges through tension, improvisation, and mutual negotiation.

The interplay of crip time and attunement is exemplified in the collaborative project *The first of its kind*, developed by Artlink and the Cherry Road Learning Centre (2019). In this project, artists worked with people with Pelizaeus-Merzbacher-like Disease and their caregivers through open-ended temporal rhythms and multisensory creative approaches. Rather than prioritising efficiency, the process centred on affective engagement, relational dynamic co-presence, and bodily responsiveness. Reflection does not function as a discrete cognitive phase but unfolds simultaneously with sensory interaction and social exchange, in line with McRuer’s (2018) framing of crip time. Levy and Young (2020) argued that such relational and embodied modes of reflection reconstruct the ethical and aesthetic foundations of social care. By challenging normative temporalities and hierarchies of expert knowledge, the integration of crip time and relational learning reconfigures care as an inclusive, co-constituted process shaped by difference and interdependence.

In collaborative projects, audiences are no longer positioned as passive recipients but as active participants in the co-production of meaning and reflexive interpretation through multisensory engagement. For instance, Javier Téllez’s film installation *Letter on the blind for the use of those who see* documents the first-time encounter of six blind New Yorkers with a live elephant (Canadian Art,

2009). The participants sequentially explored different parts of the elephant through touch, smell, and hearing, generating diverse and affectively charged responses such as astonishment, scepticism, and aversion. Concurrently, Téllez commissioned an audio-described version of the film at the Govett-Brewster Museum for the visitors who are visually impaired (Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2009).

Audience members in this context are not merely subjects of reflection-on-action but collaborators in the construction of participatory, multisensory experiences. The work mobilises non-visual perceptual modalities to provoke critical reflection, prompting audiences with visual impairment to reconsider established sensory frameworks and underlying cognitive assumptions. This curatorial approach, grounded in the experiences of the other, enables reflexive practice to emerge not only within the creator's process but continuously through the interactions between audiences, artworks, and the broader exhibition context. As curator Michele Faguet notes, Téllez's work seeks to "engage in an ethical manner with communities of individuals who live outside the models of normative behaviour" (Anya and Andrew Shiva Gallery, 2024).

This very relationship constitutes a deeper layer of social reflection embedded within collaborative artistic practice, illuminating reflexivity as a mechanism of ongoing negotiation with perceptual norms and cultural boundaries. Pink (2015a) further argued that reflection is not a purely introspective activity but a fluid practice that emerges through sensory pathways and environmental embeddedness. The initiation of reflexive engagement lies not solely in the artwork itself but in the ways audiences are affectively and corporeally drawn into the experiential field.

These cases demonstrate that reflexive mechanisms within collaborative artistic practice operate as embodied, multisensory, and relational processes. Reflexivity is not confined to the internal

cognition of the creator but is continually expanded through sustained negotiations with others, with materials, and with spatial environments. Crip time offers a critical lens through which reflexive practice can be reinterpreted (Kafer, 2013), not as a matter of cognitive efficiency or immediate adjustment but as a practice that legitimises diverse bodily rhythms, sensory channels, and modes of social participation (Samuels, 2017; Sheppard, 2020). Reflexive art practices that strive for genuine inclusivity should critically reconsider normative temporalities and vision-centred epistemologies, and instead embrace asynchronous, multimodal, and co-constituted pathways of reflection.

This reconceptualisation of reflexivity, understood here not as an individualised cognitive act but as a socially and culturally situated process, challenges the normative temporal structures and perceptual frameworks that govern artistic creation. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1990) notion of reflexive epistemology, reflexive logic refers to the way agents reflect on their position within fields of power, habitus, and cultural production. In the context of disability arts, this entails a critical interrogation of how artistic norms, sensory hierarchies, and creative legitimacy are socially constructed and reinforced. It prompts further critical inquiry: How are these norms embedded in dominant cultural narratives? In what ways do interpretations of disability, sensory difference, and creativity shape the scope of artistic expression and social participation? As the following section will demonstrate, cultural perspectives not only inform prevailing imaginaries of normalcy and ability but also provide theoretical and practical foundations for challenging normative aesthetic and temporal conventions.

2.4 Cultural Contexts of Disability and Creative Practice

Disability is not a culturally neutral concept. Scholars within CDS and Crip theory argue that understandings of disability are deeply embedded within specific social, political, and cultural contexts

(Goodley et al., 2019; Shildrick, 2020). Although global disability rights movements have made significant progress in promoting inclusion and accessibility, the ways in which disability is interpreted, experienced, and represented continue to be profoundly shaped by local cultural norms and value systems.

Cultural differences can bring various understandings of creativeness, art, and disability to the artists, audiences, and curators. In the emerging field of critical disability research, transdisciplinary approaches have become essential because disability is not only a biomedical or legal issue but also a cultural, social, and aesthetic phenomenon. Combining insights from sociology, cultural studies, and the arts, transdisciplinary research enables a more nuanced understanding of how disability is recognised, represented, and contested across different contexts. The cultural model of Disability Studies also plays a key role and is committed to “read[ing] disability through culture”, which also confirms the importance of a transdisciplinary approach (Waldschmidt et al., 2017, p. 12).

Moreover, Shakespeare (2014) argued that one of the most powerful developments in CDS is the cultural studies approach, which draws extensively on the humanities and the arts. This approach links disability to both dominant and counter-hegemonic forms of cultural reproduction, such as disability arts, activist performance, and experimental media, that challenge normative aesthetics and dominant representations (Hutchins, 2008). This section aims to critically explore the Chinese and New Zealand communities' understanding of cultural concepts associated to disability and arts-related contexts and to promote a more inclusive society.

2.4.1 Disability, Culture and Aesthetics Value

Disability, when understood through a cultural lens, is not a universally defined condition. Rather, it is a socially and culturally constructed identity, whose meaning is continually shaped, interpreted, and regulated through cultural discourse, symbolic representation, and aesthetic practice (Hadley et al., 2024). Within dominant cultural narratives, circulated through mainstream media, art institutions, and biomedical discourses, disability is routinely framed as a deviation from established norms (Shildrick, 2020). While Andrews et al. (2019) emphasised the role of symbolic representation in this process, Puar (2017) cautioned that such accounts risk overlooking how economic structures intersect with aesthetic norms to police disabled bodies.

Such cultural frameworks are far from incidental; they are deeply embedded in artistic and aesthetic traditions that valorise symmetry, hierarchy, and scale as markers of visual coherence and, by extension, beauty. As Jiang and de Rijke (2021) observed, the structural coherence of an image, achieved through these formal arrangements, is regularly treated as universally appealing, thus reinscribing the authority of classical aesthetic principles. Once institutionalised within art and design education, however, such principles risk marginalising bodily differences and sensory divergences that do not conform to this normative template. These aesthetic conventions determine which artistic forms are regarded as beautiful and whose bodies and narratives are accorded artistic value. In visual and performative arts, for instance, qualities such as bodily symmetry, physical dexterity, and visual clarity are routinely privileged as criteria that systematically exclude artists with physical disabilities or sensory impairments. These conventions not only reflect culturally specific preferences but also

function as disciplinary mechanisms that regulate the visibility, legitimacy, and participation of disabled bodies in artistic spaces (Bone, 2017; Levy & Young, 2020).

However, the continued privileging of normative aesthetics often imposes constraining effects on disability art practices, making it difficult for atypical, embodied experiences to gain legitimate space for expression within mainstream artistic contexts. This suggests that culture does not merely serve as a neutral backdrop for expression; rather, it fundamentally shapes the ways in which art is perceived, interpreted, and valued.

Moreover, the cultural frameworks surrounding disability are not uniform across different sociocultural contexts. They are intertwined with broader systems of values, such as collectivism, individualism, religious beliefs, and national ideologies, resulting in diverse and complex modes of understanding. For instance, the Confucian-influenced emphasis on familial responsibility and social harmony in China (Billioud, 2021) contrasts with the rights-based, individual autonomy-oriented discourse regularly found in Western liberal democracies (Galston, 2018). This multicultural complexity presents significant challenges for research.

A substantial body of scholarship has shown that perceptual environments shape individuals' attention to culturally specific patterns and that variations in perception across cultures lead to different attentional and cognitive tendencies (Boduroglu et al., 2009; Markus & Kitayama, 2014; Qiong, 2017). Building on this, Rachmad (2022) has argued that specific cultural orientations, such as collectivism versus individualism, play a key factor shaping perceptual processes. Individuals from different cultural backgrounds may exhibit distinct cognitive processing styles, such as a preference for contextual versus analytical perception.

Research on perception and cognition suggests that East Asians tend to perceive the world holistically, focusing on the field and the relationships among objects, whereas Westerners show a preference for analytical perspectives, emphasising attention to salient individual features (Ardila, 2021; Barreto et al., 2021; Čeněk, 2015; Kitayama & Salvador, 2024). This cultural difference is directly reflected in landscape design traditions. For instance, classical Chinese gardens, such as the Humble Administrator's Garden in Suzhou, China, emphasise harmony and multisensory exploration through asymmetry and symbolic arrangements that evoke *yin-yang* balance (Cen et al., 2023). In contrast, Western gardens, like the Palace of Versailles, adopt linear perspective and symmetrical layout to direct visual focus and assert spatial control (Hyde, 2021). These divergent aesthetic principles reflect broader cognitive tendencies, holistic in the East and analytical in the West. They further reinforce the idea that perception is culturally constructed rather than universally fixed (Hutchins, 2008).

These culturally embedded perceptual frameworks not only shape aesthetic traditions but also inform how disability is represented and interpreted in narrative forms across media. For example, disability narratives are frequently situated within the framework of "narrative prosthesis" (Thoelen, 2020, p. 314), wherein disabled characters or bodies are symbolically deployed to advance narratives of tragedy or triumph centred on able-bodied protagonists. A common example of this is seen in mainstream film, such as *Me before you* (Sharrock, 2016), where the disabled character's death serves as a narrative catalyst for the personal growth of the able-bodied heroine (Wilde, 2018). Similarly, The film *Music*, directed by Sia, exemplifies narrative prosthesis by using an autistic character primarily as a symbolic catalyst for the emotional transformation of the able-bodied protagonist (Türkmen & Yürük, 2023). These portrayals instrumentalise disability, rendering disabled figures hyper-visible as

metaphors or sources of inspiration, while simultaneously denying them narrative agency and full subjectivity.

Building on this critique of dominant narratives, this study does not use the term “multiculturalism” as a general reference to cultural diversity (Johansson, 2024, p. 75). Instead, it adopts multiculturalism as a focused analytical framework for examining how disability and creative practice are produced and expressed within two specific cultural contexts: China and New Zealand. This choice carries both personal and political significance. The researcher, who has lived extensively in China and undertaken academic research and study in China, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, brings a unique perspective to the investigation of how cultural values, policy environments, and aesthetic traditions collectively shape understandings of disability and modes of artistic expression.

The cultural framing of disability and arts in China is characterised by collectivist ideologies and centrally coordinated state narratives (Lin & Yang, 2023). In contrast, New Zealand’s framework is shaped by a bicultural foundation that integrates both Indigenous and settler perspectives, further informed by rights-based discourses that promote inclusive cultural participation (Ide & Beddoe, 2022). These two contexts differ significantly in their foundational principles and practical approaches. However, this research does not treat the cultures as binary opposites. Instead, these two cultural perspectives on disability and art are approached as interrelated and dynamic cultural fields, each marked by its own tensions and possibilities. Through comparative analysis and critical dialogue, the study aims to reveal the ways in which culture, particularly institutional structures, sociocultural practices, aesthetic conventions, and value systems, profoundly mediates the construction and interpretation of disability art.

2.4.2 Disability and Creative Art Practice in China

Since ratifying the United Nations CRPD in 2008, China has undertaken a range of initiatives aimed at aligning national policy with international disability rights frameworks (China Disabled Persons' Federation Office et al., 2021). The implementation of the CRPD's principles in China has been shaped by a distinctive national context marked by strong state coordination, rapid economic development, and top-down policy mobilisation. One notable example of how China has operationalised these principles is the increasing educational access for people with visual impairment. In 2013, a landmark policy shift enabled Li Jinsheng, a blind student, to become the first person permitted to take the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), a standardised, nationwide university admission test in China, using Braille. This breakthrough led to the Ministry of Education's formal directive in 2015, which mandated reasonable accommodation for students with visual, hearing, and physical impairments during college entrance exams (Huang, 2019). These educational measures reflect how the CRPD has been operationalised within China's broader agenda to promote social inclusion, particularly under the national common prosperity policy framework (Wang et al., 2022). However, challenges remain in ensuring consistency and accessibility, especially in rural areas, where such gaps persist (Cui et al., 2019).

The process of implementing the CRPD in China has catalysed a broader discursive shift in how disability is conceptualised. As discussed earlier in Section 2.2, understandings of disability are not static but are mediated through a range of models, such as the medical, social, and rights-based models, each with distinct implications for policy, representation, and lived experience. In the Chinese context, these models frequently intersect in complex ways rather than existing in linear progression.

While state policy increasingly invokes the language of inclusion and rights, institutional practices and public discourse still regularly reflect a medicalised understanding of impairment, framing disability as a deficit to be managed or rehabilitated.

This tension is particularly evident in the evolution of disability-related terminology in China. Earlier terms, such as “残废” (cánfèi), which is “cripple or handicap”, commonly used before the 1980s, were deeply rooted in the medical model and carried heavy stigma. From the late 1980s onward, terms like “残疾” (cánjí) gained official status with the establishment of the China Disabled Persons’ Federation and the enactment of the 1990 Disability Protection Law (Liu, 2019). While comparatively more neutral, the term still reflects a deficit-oriented, biomedical conception of the body aligned with the medical model of disability. More recently, the emergence of “残障” (cánzhàng) in academic and advocacy contexts reflects increasing alignment with the social model promoted by the CRPD. While official discourse still predominantly uses “残疾” (cánjí), ongoing debates among scholars and activists highlight how language plays a crucial role in reinforcing or challenging dominant models of disability. These terminological shifts not only signal changing societal attitudes but also reflect broader efforts to reconceptualise disability as a structural and cultural issue rather than a fixed individual trait.

Recognising disability through a critical lens requires moving beyond a binary of social versus biological causes. The evolving terminology in China, from cánfèi to cánjí to cánzhàng, signals deeper shifts in how disability is conceptualised, from a biomedical deficit to a relational identity shaped by social, cultural, and material conditions. Debates within academic and activist forums highlight how values such as collectivism, filial duty, and social harmony continue to shape understandings of

disability. This evolving discourse informs not only policy but also the emergence of disability art practices across China.

In the realm of arts, the past decade has witnessed a growing number of people with disabilities engaging in diverse creative practices across China. Various initiatives and organisations have emerged to provide platforms for inclusive artistic expression. For instance, the UK-China Disability Arts Forum, established in 2019, advocates for equality and inclusion in cultural and artistic sectors (British Council, 2023b). In addition, over the past two decades, several disability arts organisations, founded both by disabled individuals and allies, have begun to flourish in major urban centres in China. One such example is Body On & On, a contemporary cultural organisation in Guangzhou, China, focusing on embodiment, inclusivity, art, and healing. Through body-centred research, artistic innovation, and international exchange, the organisation explores the intersection of somatic experience and social value (Body On & On, 2019). Another case is the One Plus One public welfare group, which promotes inclusive design and creative methods for people with visual impairment in China.

Despite these positive developments, disability art initiatives remain largely concentrated in major metropolitan areas. In smaller cities and rural regions, such efforts are limited or entirely absent. This disparity reflects the uneven dissemination of disability awareness and continued social inequality in certain local contexts. In these areas, discrimination and marginalisation in everyday life persist, posing significant challenges to the integration of disability art into broader cultural and social discourse.

Despite these positive developments, disability art initiatives in China remain largely concentrated in major metropolitan areas. In smaller cities and rural regions, such efforts are limited or entirely absent, reflecting the uneven dissemination of disability awareness and persistent social inequalities across local contexts (China Disabled Persons' Federation Office et al., 2021). Discrimination and marginalisation in everyday life continue to pose significant challenges to the integration of disability art into broader cultural and social discourse (British Council, 2023a). While cross-national platforms such as the UK-China Disability Arts Forum represent promising steps towards transnational dialogue, such initiatives tend to be sporadic and often shaped by externally driven agendas. They frequently lack sustained infrastructural support and fail to foster reciprocal knowledge exchange. This raises critical questions about the depth, equity, and transformative potential of current cross-cultural disability art collaborations, particularly in terms of mutual learning, long-term impact, and structural inclusion.

2.4.3 Disability and Creative Art Practice in New Zealand

Since ratifying the CRPD in 2008, Aotearoa New Zealand has made notable efforts to align domestic disability policy with international human rights frameworks. Initiatives such as the New Zealand Disability Strategy (NZDS) 2016–2026 (Stats NZ, 2017) and the Disability Action Plan 2019–2023 (Melham, 2023) articulate a clear rhetorical commitment to promoting participation, equality, and inclusive citizenship for disabled people. These policies adopt language aligned with the social and rights-based models of disability and stress principles such as autonomy, self-determination, and accessibility. However, critical analysis has highlighted the gap between these formal commitments and the actual experiences of people with disability, particularly in relation to structural barriers

embedded in education, employment, health care, and housing (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2022). As scholars and advocacy groups have argued, while public discourse in New Zealand increasingly promotes diversity and inclusion, the governance structures often reflect neoliberal priorities,¹ shifting responsibility for access onto individuals and families instead of addressing structural barriers through systemic reform (Murray & Loveless, 2021).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, understandings of disability have increasingly moved beyond the binary opposition between the medical and social models, towards more relational, multidimensional, and culturally embedded frameworks (Ingham et al., 2022). As discussed in Section 2.2, this shift emphasises that disability is not simply the result of individual impairment but is constituted through the dynamic interplay between embodied difference and social, material, and cultural environments. Within Māori and Pacific epistemologies, collective values such as *whānau* (extended family), *mana* (dignity and spiritual authority), and *tūrangawaewae* (a sense of place and belonging) provide an alternative foundation for understanding disability, not as individual deficit but as a natural part of communal life (Morrison et al., 2020). These perspectives reframe disability as a relational and situated experience, positioning disabled people within networks of interdependence and mutual care rather than at the margins of society.

¹ These neoliberal priorities refer to a policy orientation that emphasises individual responsibility, cost-efficiency, and market-based solutions, often at the expense of collective welfare provision or structural reform.

This culturally grounded understanding of disability aligns with rights-based and capabilities approaches that emphasise self-determination, dignity, and holistic wellbeing. However, despite rhetorical commitments, these frameworks are often inconsistently implemented in practice (Ravichandran et al., 2022). Education, healthcare, and social service systems in Aotearoa New Zealand remain shaped by normative standards and monocultural structures that marginalise people with disability, particularly the people with intersecting racial, generational, linguistic, or less-visible impairments (Rivas Velarde, 2018). As Simon-Kumar (2018) demonstrated, even in spaces framed as inclusive, people with disability often face implicit demands to conform or justify presence, revealing the conditional and performative nature of inclusion itself. Transformative change, as disability advocates argue, requires dismantling entrenched hierarchies that privilege biomedical expertise over lived experience and recognising disabled people as co-producers of knowledge (Grech & Soldatic, 2016). Without such structural and sustained engagement, inclusion risks becoming a symbolic gesture that reinforces the very inequities it seeks to challenge.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, people with disabilities have a relatively high level of engagement in the arts, both as audiences and, increasingly, as creators. According to data collected by Creative New Zealand, the national arts development agency, 76% of people with lived experience of disability attended arts events in 2020, surpassing the national average, with many participating in diverse forms such as digital art, performance, and interactive installations (Creative New Zealand, 2020). However, while quantitative participation appears high, qualitative barriers remain. A significant proportion of people with disability express interest in participating as artists but do not yet do so regularly, indicating underlying issues of access, confidence, and opportunity. Initiatives such as the

InterACT Disability Arts Festival (Interacting Disability Arts Trust, 2011), which provides inclusive platforms for performance, exhibition, and community-building, represent important steps towards creating culturally safe and affirming spaces (Walters, 2023). These festivals not only celebrate disabled creativity but also challenge normative assumptions about artistic value, embodiment, and audience engagement.

Despite notable efforts to foster inclusive arts participation in Aotearoa New Zealand, significant structural and regional disparities remain. While initiatives such as the Interact Festival and Creative New Zealand's accessibility strategies have increased visibility and opportunities for artists with disability, access to funding, training, and professional development continues to be uneven, particularly in rural areas and among tāngata whaikaha Māori and Pacific disabled communities (Allen + Clarke/All is For All, 2023). Many artists with disability face logistical barriers, under-resourced support systems, and limited access to adaptive tools and culturally responsive mentorship (Janson et al., 2013). These systemic constraints are often reinforced by grant frameworks and institutional expectations that prioritise productivity over process and favour dominant aesthetic norms.

Disability inclusion in the arts may remain conditional and symbolic rather than genuinely transformative. However, recent initiatives, such as the Creative New Zealand Artist Fellowship, launched in 2023, signal a gradual shift towards more structurally inclusive practices (Arts Access Aotearoa, 2023). These programmes aim to recognise the artists with disability not merely as participants but as cultural leaders, fostering creative ecosystems that position them as agents of change, decision-makers, and aesthetic innovators. Despite these encouraging developments and

New Zealand's formal commitments to bicultural governance, cross-cultural disability art collaborations, particularly with non-Western countries, remain underdeveloped (Creative New Zealand, 2024a). The complexities of bicultural frameworks, centred on the evolving relationship between Māori and Pākehā, can sometimes limit broader intercultural engagement by foregrounding internal reconciliation over transnational dialogue (Creative New Zealand, 2022). As a result, current initiatives often reflect Western-led curatorial paradigms, with limited recognition of epistemic diversity or structural asymmetries in international partnerships (Umaga, 2020). This absence of sustained and reciprocal collaboration constrains the transformative potential of global disability arts exchange and risks reinforcing existing hierarchies in knowledge production and cultural representation.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has identified several key theoretical and practical gaps in the intersecting fields of Disability Studies, ocular-centric theories of artistic perception, and cross-cultural approaches to collaborative disability arts practice. These insights emerged through a critical review of disability experience and theory, visual impairment and non-visual artistic practices as well as culturally situated and collaborative perspectives on disability and art, with a particular focus on the institutional, conceptual, and artistic dynamics in both China and Aotearoa New Zealand.

First, while many scholars have critiqued the binary opposition between the medical and social models of disability and proposed more nuanced theoretical frameworks, such as the rights-based model, relational approaches, and intersectional analyses, these models often remain abstract and insufficiently connected to creative practice. Such frameworks tend to overlook the lived,

embodied experiences and material differences of disabled individuals, particularly in artistic contexts. Although CDS and Crip theory have significantly advanced understandings of disability by foregrounding bodily difference and epistemic diversity, there remains limited attention to how these ideas translate into multisensory artistic processes, embodied collaborative practice, and the generation of cultural meaning through creative acts. Bridging this gap requires moving beyond conceptual critique to engage with the ways in which embodied difference becomes a generative force within artistic collaborative practice and aesthetic innovation.

Second, current theories of art and perception remain heavily influenced by ocularcentrism, and non-visual art continues to be marginalised within dominant theoretical frameworks. The creative work of artists with visual impairment is frequently framed through narratives of sensory substitution or compensation for visual loss. This chapter has instead drawn on literature that challenges such deficit-based interpretations, proposing that non-visual practices constitute reconfigurations of perceptual experience and function as generative aesthetic modes with autonomous value. There is a notable lack of inquiry into how artists with visual impairment, especially in collaborative contexts with sighted practitioners, cultivate new sensory habits and expressive modalities through embodied difference and situated environmental affordances.

Third, although culturally situated disability art research has highlighted institutional disparities and contextual tensions, attention to the generative potential of cross-cultural collaboration remains limited. As demonstrated through the comparison of China and Aotearoa New Zealand, most cross-national initiatives are sporadic and shaped by structurally asymmetric

partnerships. New possibilities emerging from intercultural dialogue, embodied collaboration, and shared sensory exploration in disability art have yet to be thoroughly theorised or documented.

Chapter 2 identified three key gaps in existing scholarship that the current study seeks to address:

(1) The theoretical models of disability that remain insufficiently linked to embodied, multisensory artistic practices and the generation of cultural meaning through collaborative creative processes.

(2) The ocular-centric marginalisation of non-visual and multi-sensory artistic modalities.

(3) The underdeveloped and asymmetrical nature of cross-cultural disability arts collaborations.

The following chapter proposes a methodological framework using an axiological approach that foregrounds transdisciplinary and cross-cultural inquiry. This study adopts a transdisciplinary qualitative design that brings together phenomenology, Chinese Daoist philosophy, and practice-based collaborative practice to re-centre multisensory experience, creative processes, and co-production, dimensions largely overlooked in existing disability arts research. Chapter 3 outlines how this approach engages with the intangible dynamics of perception, dialogue, and meaning-making within cross-cultural artistic partnerships. In doing so, the study directly responds to the theoretical and practical limitations articulated in Chapter 2 and opens new methodological pathways for contextualising disability-led creative practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Axiological Foundations for Integrating Methodologies

Art-based research is grounded in the premise that artistic expression generates meanings that are not merely aesthetic but relational, situated, and often cross-sensory. These meanings emerge through the articulation of participants' ideas, emotions, and embodied experiences in context-specific engagements. As Tian (2023) observed, the research process itself becomes a site of continuous meaning-making, as relationships between researchers and participants are constructed, negotiated, and reconfigured over time. In collaborative practices involving artists with visual impairment, these processes are further complicated by asymmetries of perception, sensory access, and cultural expectation, requiring researchers to attend not only to what is made, but to how meaning is co-developed across sensory, disciplinary, and cultural differences.

To address these complexities, this study adopts an axiological perspective that moves beyond methodological application to critically examine the value structures underpinning both theory and practice. Specifically, it asks how dominant evaluative frameworks, such as ocularcentrism, the idealisation of sensory substitution, and normative aesthetic conceptions of disability, shape the ways in which non-visual art is created, interpreted, and legitimised. In this context, axiology functions not as a fixed evaluative rubric but as a reflexive orientation: one that reveals the implicit value assumptions embedded in methodological choices and facilitates the dialogic integration of diverse perspectives, including phenomenology, CDS, and Daoist philosophy.

This study asks how non-visual art, by mobilising multiple perceptual modes, can reshape dominant understandings of disability and social cognition. However, such inquiry should confront

persistent gaps in recognition and understanding within both cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural contexts, particularly the privileging of visual aesthetics, the marginalisation of alternative sensory modalities, and the lack of integrative frameworks across epistemological traditions. Here, axiology provides a reflexive and cross-cultural orientation that enables critical alignment between phenomenological insight, CDS critique, Daoist relational thinking, and the lived dynamics of collaborative art-making. In this study, axiology is not framed as a standalone critical framework but, rather, as an integrative route-map that guides the methodological journey. It functions dynamically across the research process by helping to locate, interrogate, and mediate the values embedded in different disciplinary, cultural, and perceptual approaches. Specifically, axiology contributes in three interconnected ways:

(1) Value mapping: Drawing on CDS, it identifies and critiques normative assumptions, such as ocularcentrism, able-bodied ideals, and aesthetic hierarchies, that shape the interpretation of non-visual art and the lived experience of disability.

(2) Method mediation: Axiology enables the coordination of diverse methodological perspectives, including multiple qualitative approaches that focus on subjective experience, Daoist philosophy's intuitive sensibility, and collaborative art practice's embodied engagement. This mediation ensures that no single framework dominates and that theoretical integration remains dialogic and pluralistic.

(3) Reflexive navigation: It foregrounds the researcher's positionality and the ethical responsibility to remain attentive to cultural specificity, power asymmetries, and epistemological bias

throughout the research. Axiology thereby facilitates a mode of inquiry that is both critically rigorous and responsive to the lived experiences of participants and the researcher.

In contrast to much existing research in disability arts and sensory ethnography that has tended to rely on a single methodological paradigm, such as IPA (Smith, 2009), autoethnography (Adams et al., 2017), or phenomenology applied in isolation without broader critical integration (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2017), this study constructs an axiologically integrated, cross-cultural, and transdisciplinary methodological framework. This research consciously brings together phenomenology, Daoist philosophy, CDS, and collaborative artistic practice, coordinated through axiology as a mediating principle. Rather than treating non-visual art as a symbolic or compensatory gesture, this study positions sensory reconfiguration and embodied difference at the centre of meaning-making. This methodological constellation not only deepens the engagement with lived sensory experience but also enables a systematic critique of the normative epistemologies that shape aesthetic value and representations of disability.

Through this axiological orientation, the study critically interrogates dominant assumptions in contemporary art evaluation, particularly the privileging of vision, the portrayal of sensory substitution as compensatory, and aesthetic norms that marginalise disabled bodies and non-visual sensory modalities. Rather than seeking theoretical consensus, axiology facilitates an ongoing, cross-cultural negotiation of meaning that keeps phenomenology, CDS, and Daoist philosophy in dialogic tension while respecting their distinct epistemological standpoints. In this way, axiology links perception, method, and critique through a coherent yet flexible methodological approach. This

enables the study to connect intuitive, embodied creative practices with critical analysis of structural bias, offering new insights into how non-visual art shapes disability experience and social cognition.

3.2 Cross-cultural Dialogue Between Daoism and Phenomenology

This section develops a cross-cultural methodological dialogue by integrating phenomenology's structured analysis of lived experience with the relational and intuitive orientation of Daoist thought. Rather than merely combining two philosophical traditions, this integration enables a multi-layered framework for interpreting sensory practices within collaborative art-making. Phenomenology offers tools for describing embodied perception in situated contexts, while Daoism provides a non-dualistic and ecologically attuned perspective that foregrounds interdependence and spontaneity. Together, they open interpretive space beyond Western critical rationality and visual epistemologies, enabling a deeper engagement with how artists with visual impairment navigate creativity, perception, and relationality. This methodological dialogue is not aimed at synthesis or resolution, but at cultivating critical reflexivity and cultural sensitivity in understanding the values and assumptions embedded in both artistic process and analytical method.

3.2.1 Methodological Complementarity of Epoché, Bracketing, and Wu-Wei

Phenomenology, as developed by Husserl, is a philosophical method aimed at revealing the structures of subjective experience by adopting "back to the things themselves" (Husserl, 2013, p. 23). Central to this approach is *epoché*, the deliberate suspension of presuppositions in order to access phenomena as they are lived (Husserl & Moran, 2012; Kjosavik et al., 2018). In qualitative research, particularly phenomenological and IPA traditions, this philosophical stance is operationalised through bracketing (Chan et al., 2013). Bracketing is a reflexive process in which the researcher actively

identifies and temporarily sets aside personal assumptions, theoretical preconceptions, and value judgements to engage more openly with participants' accounts (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

By foregrounding intentionality, the directedness of consciousness towards objects, phenomenology prioritises first-person accounts that uncover the essence of perception from within embodied experience (Beyer, 2022; Husserl, 1931). In the context of this research, the combined orientation of epoché and bracketing enables a nuanced engagement with how artists with visual impairment navigate the world through non-visual modalities. For instance, when producing photographic work, the artists rely on auditory cues, spatial awareness, and bodily orientation, thus challenging the visual assumptions embedded in conventional photography. Such practices require the suspension of ocular-centric assumptions and the centring intentionality of non-visual sensory experience, exemplifying the critical potential of phenomenology to interrogate the normative foundations of aesthetic judgement and sensory hierarchy.

While phenomenology is rooted in Western philosophical traditions, its foundational concern with lived experience and embodied perception finds resonance with core principles in Daoist philosophy. In this research, the participating artists in China frequently described a mode of intrinsic awareness that resists linguistic articulation yet remains central to the creative process. Rather than interpreting this as a mystical or essentialist cultural trait, this study situates such experiences within a broader Daoist epistemology that values bodily attunement and relational being. The *Dao De Jing* conceptualises the "Dao" as a formless, generative force permeating all things (Mullinax, 2021), a notion that transcends the confines of linguistic representation and aligns conceptually with phenomenology's idea of intentionality. Daoist ethics further propose that humans should act in

accordance with, rather than against, the rhythms of nature, resisting instrumental rationality and emphasising situated, embodied responsiveness (Mullinax, 2021).

The Daoist concept of *wu-wei* advocates for “attain[ing] the ultimate nihility and maintain[ing] the serenity sincerely” (Laozi & Yang, 2018, p. 101), advocating attunement to the natural order and responsiveness to contextual rhythms rather than imposing individual will or analytic control (Tzu, 2020). This principle resonates with the phenomenological stance of epoché, which entails the philosophical suspension of presuppositions in order to encounter phenomena as they are. While epoché and *wu-wei* both aim to decentre normative assumptions and allow meanings to emerge organically, their ontological logics differ: phenomenology foregrounds intentional suspension and reflective awareness, whereas Daoism emphasises fluid receptivity and embodied alignment. *Wu-wei* thus offers a complementary sensibility to phenomenology, encouraging attentiveness to the ambiguous, the emergent, and the not-yet-formulated within creative and perceptual processes.

In this research, the dialogical interplay between phenomenology and Daoist *wu-wei* serves as more than cultural analogy. It also becomes a methodological strategy to interrogate and resist normative constraints on disability, perception, and aesthetic value. Phenomenology provides a rigorous reflexive tool for destabilising assumptions, such as the visual normativity of artistic creation or the confinement of disabled bodies to deficit logics. In parallel, *wu-wei* cautions against instrumentalising theory, urging a generative openness that honours the indeterminate and the experiential. By juxtaposing these frameworks, this study challenges both Western critical rigidity and the risk of idealisation in Eastern philosophy, instead cultivating a critically reflexive and culturally embedded mode of inquiry.

However, in the context of cross-cultural research, the integration of phenomenology and Daoist philosophy raises critical methodological and ethical questions. While this study seeks to draw on their complementarity, it should remain alert to the asymmetrical power dynamics that shape theoretical exchanges between Western and non-Western paradigms (Miike, 2019; Nelson, 2020). Specifically, when the study engages with Western critical theories such as CDS and Crip theory, how can Daoist philosophy be prevented from being instrumentalised or reduced to an orientalist symbol, ensuring that it makes a substantive theoretical contribution to the research? Rather than neutralising these epistemological tensions, this study sustains them as generative sites of critical inquiry.

This methodological positioning is deeply informed by the central themes of embodiment and cross-cultural perception identified in the previous chapter. Phenomenology's focus on lived, bodily experience is operationalised in research practice through reflexive bracketing. This provides the tools to attend to the artists' sensory navigation and creative agency beyond visual norms. In parallel, the Daoist principle of *wu-wei* offers a culturally grounded framework that values attunement, fluidity, and responsiveness to context, counterbalancing overly prescriptive or control-oriented tendencies in research. While phenomenology seeks to suspend or manage presuppositions to encounter phenomena as they are, *wu-wei* emphasises embodied receptivity and alignment with emergent processes.

Together, these perspectives enable a situated understanding of disability art practice that avoids compensatory narratives and universalising assumptions, foregrounding how perception, meaning-making, and artistic expression are mediated through embodied experience. This methodological orientation directly addresses RQ 1 and RQ 2 by providing a theoretical foundation for

examining how the perceptual, social, and cultural construction of creative practice among artists with visual impairment challenges prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art, and vision impairment in China and New Zealand, and how these artists navigate and contest visual-centric creative traditions.

3.2.2 *Being-in-the-world and Human–Nature Harmony*

Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology reorients the focus of inquiry from isolated consciousness to *Dasein*, a being fundamentally situated in and shaped by its world (Heidegger, 2010). Rather than seeing meaning as something subjectively constructed through detached observation, Heidegger argued that it arises through our attunement to the structures and rhythms of everyday life (van Manen, 2023). As Chai further clarifies, Heidegger's notion of *Lichtung*, or the "clearing" (2018, p. 583), describes a dynamic openness through which beings can appear. This "clearing" is not a neutral space but an existential field shaped by historical, cultural, and affective conditions. Thus, to understand existence is to interpret this interplay between self and world, where meaning emerges through the process of world-disclosure rather than from objective description. This ontological framing is particularly relevant to the analysis of artistic practice among the artists with visual impairment in this study. The embodied engagement with materials, space, and rhythm of the artists reveals a mode of being-in-the-world that resists reductive or compensatory interpretations of disability.

The Daoist concept of *the unification of heaven and human* provides a holistic ontology that contrasts with individual-centric paradigms (Laozi, 2016). Rather than positioning the human as a separate subject interpreting the world, Daoist philosophy emphasises ontological continuity between the self and nature. As Zhuangzi affirms, individual existence is inherently intertwined with the

broader rhythms of nature, grounded in the understanding that the self and all things arise together in unity (Ziporyn, 2020). Daoism conceptualises this interaction as the natural flow of *qi* (dynamic flow or vital energy) between the human and the object, which grounds being not in static identity but in continuous relational transformation (Laozi & Yang, 2018).

Both Heidegger's concept of *being-in-the-world* (Heidegger, 2010) and Daoism's notion of the *unification of heaven and human* (Laozi, 2016) present relational ontologies that resist dualistic separations between self and world. The former conceives of human existence as embodied and situated, unfolding through attunement to the structures and rhythms of lived experience (Køster & Fernandez, 2023); the latter posits being as emerging from the continuous, reciprocal flow between the self and the natural world (Cheng, 2017). This philosophical convergence is particularly salient in the creative practices of artists with visual impairment in this study, whose works often reflect a process of becoming-with the environment. Statements such as "I feel the wind" or "moving with the texture" demonstrate not an attempt to control or resist elements, such as air currents, surfaces, or spatial conditions, but a mode of embodied attunement (Su, 2022).

While phenomenology frequently foregrounds embodied agency and meaning-making through perceptual engagement (Gallagher, 2022), Daoism introduces a complementary emphasis on yielding, spontaneity, and ecological embeddedness (Goulding, 2021). This dialectical tension between initiative and receptivity plays out in the artistic processes observed (see Chapter 5). For example, musicians adjust the compositions in response to vibrational feedback from the floor, while installation artists intuitively respond to the tactile properties of materials shaped by humidity and temperature. Rather than framing these actions as either agentic or passive, the Daoist-

phenomenological integration reveals a relational creativity: aesthetic form arises from the interplay between subjective impulse and environmental rhythm (Goulding, 2021; Nelson, 2019). This reframing challenges compensatory narratives of disability by theorising sensory difference as a generative force that remaps the relational field of perception and creation (Kuppers, 2014).

Moreover, the tension between phenomenology's reliance on interpretive language and Daoism's privileging of direct, pre-linguistic experience offers a productive methodological provocation. Where phenomenology, particularly in its hermeneutic form, requires the articulation of cultural and perceptual meaning through language (Gadamer, 2013), Daoism reminds us that language can obscure as much as it reveals. Zhuangzi's notion of obtaining the fish and forgetting the trap points to the possibility of transcending symbolic mediation in favour of experiential immediacy (Ziporyn, 2020). In this study, such tension becomes apparent when the tactile qualities of an artwork evoke memories or affective responses that cannot be fully captured or articulated through language. Rather than resolving this gap between sensory experience and linguistic articulation, the integration of these traditions sustains a critical openness: it allows the research to shift between analysis and presence, interpretation and intuition, thereby constructing a more inclusive and responsive epistemological approach to disability and artistic practice.

3.2.3 Embodied Ethics in Phenomenology and Daoism

Embodied phenomenology, particularly as developed by Merleau-Ponty, foregrounds the body as the primary site through which perception, cognition, and meaning arise. Rather than conceptualising the body as a passive instrument for consciousness, this perspective emphasises the body's active role in organising intentional experience and shaping one's orientation towards the

world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Toadvine, 2023). Cognition, from this view, is not an intellectual, solipsistic introspection, but, rather, a physical interaction embedded in the environment and manifested in the body (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2020).

However, classical phenomenology has often operated with an implicit assumption of a normative or “healthy” body as the default condition of experience. For instance, Merleau-Ponty’s (2012) foundational work *Phenomenology of Perception* frequently centres the body as a coherent, integrated structure of intentionality, often without accounting for bodily variation or impairment. Similarly, Husserl’s account of intersubjective experience privileges visible, exterior modes of appearing, which, as Michel Henry argues, universalises normative, able-bodied perception and neglects the affective dimensions of embodied life (Leclercq, 2016). These foundational accounts, while ground-breaking in describing embodiment, have been critiqued by disability scholars for marginalising the lived experiences of disabled bodies (Flynn, 2021; Goodley et al., 2018). This assumption has been critiqued by disciplines such as Disability Studies and feminist phenomenology, which argue for greater attention to bodily diversity and difference. Weiss (1999) highlighted how gender, race, and ability intersect to shape diverse bodily experiences, while Shildrick (2002) emphasised that even while underscoring the unity of body and mind, phenomenology remains grounded in a holistic ideal of the body, one that assumes health and integrity, thereby failing to fully engage with the lived experiences of disabled bodies.

As discussed in Chapter 2, scholars such as Gallagher and Zahavi (2020) and McRuer (2018) have extended classical phenomenology by challenging its implicit privileging of a normative, able-bodied subject. They advocate for a more inclusive account of embodiment, one that recognises

disability not as a deviation from a physical or cognitive norm but as a generative modality of perception, agency, and meaning-making. Building on these critiques, the methodological approach developed in this study carries forward these theoretical insights by embedding embodied difference into the interpretive and ethical foundations of collaborative artistic inquiry. This alignment enables a sustained focus on how alternative perceptual modalities, highlighted in the literature review, inform cross-cultural creative practices and unsettle normative assumptions in both research and art-making.

Normative frameworks, in this context, refer to the dominant systems of thought that define certain bodies, senses, and modes of cognition as standard or ideal, regularly privileging visual mastery, individual autonomy, and rational control (Mannor & Needham, 2024). Such frameworks are entrenched not only within classical phenomenology but also within mainstream aesthetic discourses and conventional Disability Studies, both of which have historically marginalised non-normative ways of perceiving and creating. By stabilising what counts as intelligible experience and legitimate knowledge, these normative constructs frequently obscure the lived complexity of disability and aesthetic engagement.

The critique of normative frameworks opens up space for rethinking the ontological and ethical orientations of the body and perception. These alternative orientations reject the universalisation of able-bodied experience and resist reliance on corrective logics. Within this conceptual openness, Daoist philosophy offers a deeply resonant trajectory of inquiry. Rather than grounding its view of the body in stability, hierarchy, or control, Daoism articulates a relational and process-oriented understanding of embodiment, one that emphasises attunement, receptivity, and co-existence with the environment. This perspective challenges dominant epistemologies, such as

ocular-centric frameworks that privilege sight as the primary mode of knowing (Jay, 2014), and normative perceptual frameworks that universalise able-bodied sensory experience (Flynn, 2021). At the same time, the perspective provides a grounded lens through which the non-visual creative practices of artists with visual impairment can be understood, not as acts of compensation but as situated expressions of embodied cognition.

In contrast to phenomenology's emphasis on individual perception, Daoist philosophy situates the body within a broader cosmological order governed by harmony and non-intervention. Laozi's famous statement "Which is dearer to one, one's name or one's person?" (Lau, 1958, p. 357), reflects a worldview in which the body is to be protected, nourished, and esteemed, not as an isolated entity but as a vessel of *qi* (dynamic flow or vital energy) embedded in the natural flow of the Dao. The notion of *guishen* (esteeming the body or honouring the body) emphasises the preservation of form and spirit through alignment with natural rhythms rather than through exertion or control (Mullinax, 2021). In this view, bodily practice is not oriented towards optimisation or mastery but towards balance, restraint, and self-cultivation. This orientation closely aligns with the creative processes of the artists with visual impairment in this study. Rather than compensating for visual loss through control or mastery, many participants approached art-making through sensory attunement and embodied responsiveness to the surrounding environment. For example, some participating artists allowed the textures and vibrations of materials to guide artistic actions, reflecting a Daoist sensibility in which the body serves not as a site of deficiency but as a medium for relational harmony and aesthetic expression.

This mode of embodied responsiveness resonates with Daoist interpretations of internal bodily awareness, in which perception is grounded not only in external sensory cues but also in internal sensations such as breath, pulse, and visceral rhythms. Cheng (2017) argued that Daoist symbolism of the body does not separate physical organs from emotional and cognitive functions but, rather, understands the body as an energetic and affective system through which cosmic harmony is both perceived and cultivated. In this sense, visceral feelings, such as a tightening of the chest, the flow of breath, or gut tension, is not viewed as private or subjective noise but as a meaningful register of one's alignment with the Dao. When artists with visual impairment allow texture, vibration, or inner tension to guide creative gestures, such practice reflects a Daoist thought of attunement. Embodied difference is thereby transformed into a generative force of sensory and affective expression.

Despite fundamental differences, embodied phenomenology and Daoist philosophy together furnish a dual orientation for disability art and disability aesthetic in this research. Phenomenology foregrounds embodied agency and intentionality, while Daoist philosophy advocates for an ethic of receptivity rooted in preservation, humility, and ecological attunement. Taken in concert, these perspectives recognise embodied difference as a generative source of creative expression while affirming the body's intrinsic value beyond productivity or normative function. Such complementarity becomes apparent in the practices of artists with visual impairment analysed in this study: non-visual sensory cues organise artistic gestures not as "sensory substitutes" for vision but as catalysts for sensory reconfiguration, processes that redistribute perceptual emphasis across the whole sensory modalities. Creative form thus emerges from finely attuned multisensory awareness, exemplifying an

ethical paradigm that centres difference, affirms vulnerability, and expands the possibilities of knowledge through embodied experience.

In addition, the philosophical relationship between embodied phenomenology and Daoist thought generates productive tensions that require critical scrutiny. Phenomenology's focus on subjective embodiment may risk treating perception as an individual resource, whereas Daoist thought, if applied without critical reflection, can obscure social agency by dissolving the individual into a broader natural order.

Moreover, Daoist reverence for bodily integrity may be misinterpreted as promoting an ideal of physical wholeness, which could unintentionally overlook or devalue the experiences of people with physical differences. This interpretation may inadvertently reinforce normative assumptions about bodily perfection, subtly marginalising individuals whose embodied experiences do not conform to such ideals. However, within the original philosophical context of Daoist thought, concepts such as *guishen* do not emphasise physical wholeness. Instead, Daoism foregrounds harmony, balance, and coordination between the body and its surrounding environment. Recognising this distinction is crucial for reinterpreting Daoist philosophy, not as a normative or exclusionary ideal but as a relational ontology that acknowledges and affirms bodily variation.

Sustaining a critical openness that rejects compensatory "sensory substitution" models and instead foregrounds sensory reconfiguration is therefore essential. Embracing this generative tension supports a reflexive methodology attentive to how non-visual modalities, embodied resonance, and environmental attunement reorganise relations among affect, material, and space. Such an approach articulates a nuanced conception of disability that resists marginalisation and assimilation, opening

pathways for more equitable and responsive artistic inquiry. Building on this ontological and ethical grounding, the following section examines how these philosophical insights are enacted through transdisciplinary collaborative practice across art, Disability Studies, and phenomenology.

3.3 Transdisciplinary Collaborative Mechanism for Knowledge Co-producing

Transdisciplinary approaches have become increasingly prominent in creative practice research, particularly when addressing complex issues such as disability, perception, and social inclusion. Rather than simply combining disciplines, transdisciplinary research facilitates the co-production of knowledge across academic, creative, and lived domains (Adler et al., 2018; Roux et al., 2017). This approach is especially relevant in Disability Studies, where researchers are urged to critically reflect on the epistemic authority of disciplines and to engage with diverse modes of knowing (Lawrence et al., 2022). In the context of this study, which brings together artistic collaborative practice, CDS, phenomenology, and Daoist philosophy, transdisciplinary practice is not only a methodological choice but an ethical imperative. This section critically analyses the collaborative mechanisms and value tensions that emerge from this intersection, asking how creative knowledge can be co-produced without reducing culturally and philosophically diverse understandings of embodiment to a single normative framework. It proposes a reflexive transdisciplinary model that foregrounds dialogic process, sensory experience, and critical negotiation across worldviews.

3.3.1 Situating Collaborative Practice Within a Transdisciplinary Framework

Transdisciplinary collaboration in disability-related creative practice is frequently idealised as an inclusive and integrative approach but, in practice, it is fraught with ontological and methodological tensions (Riegel & Robinson, 2023). While CDS acknowledges disability as a socially and culturally

constructed category, its transdisciplinary potential lies not only in combining disciplinary languages but in challenging the epistemological hierarchies that shape them (Moirano et al., 2020; Timmis & Williams, 2017). Disability research intersects with applied fields, like design and architecture, as well as critical humanities, but these alliances can reveal asymmetries in values, methods, and power.

Transdisciplinary research in disability-related creative practice is often framed as the smooth integration of distinct disciplinary knowledges into a unified approach (Riegel & Robinson, 2023); for example, combining the technical problem-solving of design with the critical reflexivity of the humanities to address accessibility (Costanza-Chock, 2020). However, such framings may risk overlooking the ontological and methodological frictions that emerge when disciplines carry different epistemic priorities, such as design's emphasis on solution-driven outcomes versus CDS's critical interrogation of structural inequities (Titchkosky, 2020). Rather than assuming a seamless fusion of knowledge domains, this research positions collaborative art as a situated method of transdisciplinary inquiry, one that foregrounds process over resolution, and dialogue over synthesis.

This researcher draws on Sarah Pink's experience and concept of *walking-with-video* (2007), which rethinks fieldwork as embodied movement through space. Building on Greiner and Sakdapolrak's (2013) interpretation of Casey's phenomenology of place, as emphasising place as an event shaped by bodily presence and temporal unfolding, this approach locates knowledge in the intersection of body, time, material, and environment (Pink, 2015a). The creative process becomes not a linear construction of objects but a sensory co-composition shaped by breath, rhythm, spatial harmonisation, and relational proximity (Shimada, 2022).

The act of making art together, between the sighted researcher and collaborators with visual impairment, becomes a site where different perceptual logics meet. Collaborative art practices in this study were co-developed through bodily negotiations of shared space, sound, texture, and gesture. The process is epistemic and generates new insights through shared experimentation. This resonates strongly with ethnographic practice. For instance, the act of *walking with people* signifies not only physical co-presence but also an ethical commitment to reject extractive modes of observation (Lee & Ingold, 2006). Moving together through creative improvisation reflects a form of mutual harmonisation rarely accessible through conventional interview or studio visit formats.

Moreover, collaborative art practice is fundamentally a process of dialogue and reflection. Each participant brings distinct sensorial experiences, cultural understandings, and imaginative strategies. The artists with visual impairment contributed not only non-visual insights but also reconfigured aesthetic values through their engagement with materials. The researcher, positioned as both facilitator and co-creator, navigated these processes through a hybrid visual and non-visual sensibility. This model resists hierarchical authorship and instrumentalised inclusion. Instead, it centres iterative co-creation and dialogic adaptation as key features of transdisciplinary method (Clark & Wallace, 2015).

Rather than measuring success by predefined outcomes, the evolving process itself becomes a method of inquiry. During the collaborative practices, sensory affordances, divergent temporalities, and differing conceptions of form continually reshape the direction of the work. Meaning emerges not from consensus but from friction, from the careful negotiation of diverse modes of knowing. This

resonates with Daoist notions of relational unfolding and responsiveness, which are revisited in the next section as critical interlocutors in moments of disciplinary tension.

A comparative example is Lloyd and Davis's *Behind the Times* (2020), a distributed online exhibition that deliberately avoided curatorial pre-selection. By using open calls and fluid submission platforms, the project cultivated a living, decentralised aesthetic shaped by participant interaction. As Norton et al. (2024) suggested, such formats function as affective inquiries rather than fixed outcomes, mirroring this study's emphasis on collaborative creation as a reflexive, relational, and unsettled process.

3.3.2 Negotiating Tensions Across Art, CDS, Phenomenology, and Daoism

This research engages with four major fields: artistic practice, CDS, phenomenology, and Daoist philosophy while also drawing upon four creative approaches: non-visual photography, improvised dance, music, and multimedia installation. This transdisciplinary configuration brings methodological richness and epistemic diversity, it also reveals key tensions in knowledge production, ethical positioning, and research methodologies. These tensions are not treated as contradictions to be eliminated but, rather, as productive frictions that fuel critical reflection. This section analyses three such tensions:

- (1) The ontological disjunction between embodied subjectivity and structural critique — relevant to RQ 1 (challenging prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art, and vision impairment) and RQ 3 (integrating dual perspectives of the participant-researcher and artists).

(2) The divergence between phenomenology's descriptive focus and the normative orientations of Daoism and CDS — relevant to RQ 2 (navigating and challenging visual-centric creative traditions) and RQ 3.

(3) The methodological tension between process-based artistic practice and theory-driven frameworks — relevant to RQ 3 and RQ 4 (how multi-media and multi-sensory practices shape audience understandings).

Firstly, embodied phenomenology emphasises how individuals perceive the world through their bodies and construct meaning based on subjective experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). As discussed in Section 2.3.4, the concept of embodied difference highlights variations in perception, action, and bodily experience, particularly in cases involving atypical sensory conditions or disability (Dickel, 2022). For example, the participants in this study rely on bodily orientation, tactile engagement, and auditory cues to compose images, revealing a form of intentionality grounded in non-visual modalities.

In contrast to embodied phenomenology, which focuses on how individuals navigate and make sense of the world through their bodily perception, CDS situates disability within broader socio-political and cultural frameworks, highlighting the structural conditions that shape individual experience (Goodley, 2017). While phenomenology investigates how people navigate the world through embodied perception, CDS asks how the world itself should be transformed to accommodate diverse bodies. This divergence raises a critical question: Should disability be understood primarily as a lived experience or as a socially constructed condition that demands structural change?

Daoist philosophy complicates this binary by offering a relational ontology. The concept of the unification of heaven and humanity reframes the body, not as an isolated agent or passive product of society but as dynamically situated within the rhythms of nature. Embodied difference, in this view, is not a deviation but a form of natural variation. Thus, Daoist thinking challenges both the phenomenological focus on self-contained experience and the structural emphasis of CDS, inviting a perspective grounded in ecological embeddedness and responsive adaptation.

Secondly, rather than being strictly value-neutral, phenomenology adopts a descriptive orientation that calls on researchers to temporarily bracket (*epoché*) prior assumptions and normative judgements, thereby enabling a return to the essence of lived experience as it presents itself in consciousness (de Santis, 2020). This approach can offer rich insights into how artists with visual impairment navigate material, space, and affect. However, critics have noted its limited engagement with questions of normative structures and power relations, arguing that classical phenomenology lacks a critical lens for addressing broader socio-political issues (de Boer & Zeiler, 2024; Oksala, 2023).

In contrast, both Daoism and CDS adopt clear normative stances. Daoist thought emphasises harmony and the intrinsic worth of the body, advocating for ethical attunement rather than control. The Daoist principle of esteeming the body (as mentioned in Section 3.2.3) counters socially imposed hierarchies and rejects value systems that frame impairment as lack. CDS explicitly critiques the construction of normalcy and the structural marginalisation of people with disability, seeking to dismantle exclusionary systems through social critique (Goodley, 2017).

These contrasting orientations create tension but also open possibilities. In this study, phenomenology's focus on the nuances of lived experience is placed in productive dialogue with the

ethical commitments of CDS and Daoism, generating a methodology that is both analytically precise and ethically responsive. These contrasting orientations create tension but also open possibilities. In this study, phenomenology's attention to lived experience is brought into dialogue with the ethical imperatives of CDS and the relational worldview of Daoism. This dialogue informs a methodological approach that aims to be both perceptually grounded and ethically attuned, a stance that is further elaborated in the subsequent discussion of methods and analysis.

Additionally, artistic practice emphasises intuition, process, and material experimentation. Its improvisational nature regularly resists theoretical containment. In this research, the collaborative process between the researcher and artists with visual impairment unfolded as an open-ended exploration, with initial ideas evolving through non-visual sensory engagement. As noted in Section 3.3.1, this generative process challenges theory-driven approaches by foregrounding experiential knowledge and emergent responsiveness.

Phenomenology shares certain affinities with artistic practice, especially in its attention to lived, embodied experience. Yet its methodological emphasis on intentionality and reflection may struggle to fully accommodate the spontaneity and relationality inherent in collaborative, multisensory art-making. This is particularly evident in practices such as the improvisational flow of music and dance, where rhythm and movement emerge in response to bodily cues and environmental resonance, or installation art shaped through tactile exploration and spatial memory. Meanwhile, CDS foregrounds social critique, which can sometimes impose normative expectations onto the creative process.

Once again, Daoist philosophy offers a generative counterpoint. The concept of wu-wei advocates for harmonisation rather than intervention, responsiveness rather than control. This ethos aligns closely with the improvisational flow of collaborative art practice in this study. Rather than forcing coherence across divergent frameworks, the research honours these tensions as conditions for critical co-becoming.

In summary, the purpose of integrating artistic practice, CDS, phenomenology, and Daoist philosophy in this research is not to resolve their differences but to foster a methodological orientation that remains open to relational friction. While many studies in disability arts tend to adopt a single theoretical lens or treat interdisciplinary tensions as challenges to be avoided, this study positions methodological friction as a generative resource. In contrast to approaches that separate analysis from practice, this research constructs a reflexive methodological model in which creative processes, theoretical frameworks, and embodied experience are mutually constitutive. By sustaining, rather than eliminating, the tensions among CDS, phenomenology, and Daoist thought, the study proposes a distinctive approach to transdisciplinary disability aesthetics, one rooted in sensory reconfiguration, cross-cultural ethics, and dialogic knowledge production. These tensions among theoretical and methodological paradigms form the foundation of the study's research design, supporting a reflexive, inclusive, and critically grounded mode of inquiry. The practical strategies underpinning this approach are further elaborated in the following section (3.4), through an analysis of researcher positionality and reflexive practice within cross-disciplinary collaboration.

3.4 Researcher Reflexivity in Cultural and Disciplinary Contexts

Transdisciplinary and cross-cultural research not only requires researchers to comprehend diverse theoretical frameworks and methodologies but also demands the establishment of a reflexive mechanism between their cultural identity and disciplinary background. As a researcher rooted in Chinese culture, the intersection of Daoist philosophy from the East and phenomenology from the West forms a unique intellectual standpoint. This dual cultural identity offers an intuitive understanding of perception and embodied experience while simultaneously posing challenges for theoretical integration. The researcher's dual cultural positioning is mobilised precisely to examine how multi-sensory practices in China and New Zealand unsettle dominant interpretation of "creativity" and "impairment", thereby addressing RQ 1: How does the perceptual, social, and cultural construction of creative practice of the artists with visual impairment challenge prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art, and vision impairment in China and New Zealand?

In this research, the researcher's disciplinary identity necessitates a flexible transition between the roles of artistic practitioner and critical researcher. This fluidity enables the research to critically engage with theoretical discourse, maintain a practice-oriented approach, and address broader social implications. Consequently, at the methodological level, the study should carefully balance theoretical critique, creative practice, and social relevance. This constitutes a transdisciplinary inquiry by integrating perspectives and methods from fields such as Disability Studies, sensory ethnography, and artistic research, enabling a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of embodied creative practices.

The methodological core of this study lies in reflexively integrating Daoist philosophy, phenomenology, and CDS. This dynamic integration is achieved by identifying conceptual overlaps, such as the shared emphasis on embodied experience, and by using reflexive practice to navigate cultural and epistemological tensions among these frameworks. Therefore, this study seeks to utilise axiology as a coordinating framework to explore how methodological integration can be achieved among Daoist philosophy, phenomenology, and CDS. The aim is to reconcile theoretical conflicts and provide a robust transdisciplinary foundation for this research. This section will elaborate on this methodological framework, analysing how the researcher's reflexive positioning facilitates the coordination of diverse disciplinary perspectives and how cross-cultural interpretation and disciplinary integration can deepen the understanding of the creative practices of the artists with visual impairment.

First, the researcher's dual background in Daoist philosophy and phenomenological theory provides a cross-cultural positioning that enables a multi-layered analytical framework, offering a unique perspective on understanding the creative practices of artists with visual impairment. In the artistic practices explored in this study, most participants spontaneously employ perceptual modes rooted in Daoist philosophy, such as adapting to the environment and emphasising the fluidity between the body and the external world. In engaging with these transdisciplinary collaborative practices, the researcher should establish a reflexive coordination between Daoist intuitive understanding and phenomenological critical analysis, ensuring that the study both respects cultural contexts and maintains theoretical rigour at the academic level.

In the context of the transdisciplinary collaborative practices between art, phenomenology, and CDS, as well as in the theoretical integration within a cross-cultural context, differences in theoretical paradigms are inevitable. For instance, phenomenology is rooted in descriptive analysis of embodied experience; CDS foregrounds structural critique and political advocacy; and Daoist philosophy privileges intuitive alignment with natural rhythms over interventionist reasoning. These frameworks diverge in their ontological assumptions, epistemological strategies, and ethical orientations, creating tensions that require careful reflexive navigation. This reflexive coordination between Daoist attunement and phenomenological critique provides the analytic lens for RQ 2 (How do artists with visual impairment navigate and challenge visual-centric creative traditions?), illuminating the strategies through which artists challenge ocular-centric norms.

The researcher's reflexive positionality serves as a mediating mechanism in transdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration, influencing not only the interpretation of theories but also directly shaping methodological choices and research perspectives. Positioning the researcher as collaborator and curator directly operationalises RQ 3 (How can the dual perspectives of the participant-researcher, as collaborator, co-developer, and curator, and the artists with visual impairment be integrated into creative practice as research?), ensuring that contrasting standpoints are integrated rather than hierarchised. This positioning facilitates an in-depth exploration of the embodied experiences and creative practices of artists with visual impairment while critically examining the theoretical and methodological tensions between Daoism, phenomenology, and CDS.

However, a key challenge lies in avoiding the reduction of Daoist philosophy to a symbolic or methodological accessory, used merely to add cultural distinction, without fully engaging with its

epistemological and ethical richness. In negotiating the integration of Daoist, phenomenological, and CDS perspectives, the researcher remained critically aware of the risks of oversimplifying philosophical traditions or reinforcing binary oppositions between Eastern and Western thought. Rather than framing these approaches as oppositional, this study treated their tensions as opportunities for dialogical exchange and mutual enrichment, maintaining critical rigour while remaining attentive to the fluid, intuitive, and relational insights Daoism offers. These issues underscore the methodological demands of transdisciplinary work, calling for sustained reflexivity so that the integration of diverse theoretical resources avoids epistemic hierarchies and cultural misreading.

Secondly, this study established an interaction between theory and experience by integrating the lived experiences of both artists, audiences and the researcher. This approach ensures that critical theory does not remain confined to academic discourse but accurately reflects the actual experiences of artists and audiences. The reflexive perspective of artistic practitioners is an indispensable component of the research process. Beyond analysing the artworks themselves, the study should also examine the agency of artists within the creative process. For instance, CDS emphasises how social constructions shape the experience of disability.

When investigating the creative practices of the artists with visual impairment, relying solely on social constructionist frameworks may be insufficient to fully capture their artistic experiences (Siebers, 2001). By incorporating phenomenological methods and integrating the researcher's reflexive perspective, the study can provide a more nuanced analysis of artists' subjective perception, embodied experience, and interactions with their environment. Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodied perception highlights how individuals create through tactile, auditory, smell, and proprioceptive

engagement, complementing CDS's critique of social structures. However, in the course of this inquiry, the researcher critically considers whether the analysis of embodied experience risks overlooking the social context in which the artists operate. Is an exploration of embodied sensory experience alone sufficient to account for the broader social significance of artistic creation?

The artists with visual impairment do not merely adapt to the absence of sight; rather, the artists actively explore the possibilities of non-visual sensory modalities. Therefore, the study employed a combination of semi-structured interviews and participant observations to ensure that the research remained both critically engaged and faithful to the lived experiences of the artists.

Furthermore, the reflexive perspective of the researcher on audience perception constitutes a crucial aspect of this study. While CDS often focuses on how social discourses construct the concept of disability, phenomenology provides a lens for analysing how audiences engage with art to reinterpret perception. For instance, how do accessible design elements in exhibitions, such as Braille labels, audio guides, and tactile installations, shape audience understanding of the exhibition's themes? Do these elements challenge visitors to reconsider the centrality of vision in art and reframe their understanding of disability?

These questions require a combined approach that integrates CDS's social critique with phenomenological analysis of lived experience. By reflexively observing and interpreting audience engagement with tactile and auditory affordances, drawing on field notes, observational insights, and post-exhibition reflections, the study directly addresses RQ 4: How do the multi-media and multi-sensory artistic practices of artists with visual impairment shape audience understandings of culture,

art, and disability? This analytical focus highlights how such works may reconfigure public conceptions of perception, embodiment, and disability.

In addition, this study spans two cultural contexts, China and New Zealand, requiring the researcher to engage with diverse cultural perspectives on artistic practice and to establish a balance between theoretical construction and practical analysis. These theoretical differences not only shape the creative approaches of artists but also influence how audiences from different cultural backgrounds interpret artworks. For instance, how do audiences influenced by Western cultural paradigms engage with artworks informed by cultural framework? Can they experience artistic meaning through alternative perceptual frameworks? How do they perceive disability within these artistic contexts? These reflections directly address the final research question: How do the multi-media and multisensory artistic practices of artists with visual impairment shape audience understandings of culture, art, and disability?

This reflexive positioning, spanning cultural, theoretical, and methodological domains, forms the foundation for the research design and data collection strategies outlined in the next chapter. Unlike conventional approaches that separate researcher and participant, theory and practice, or Western and non-Western knowledge systems (Connell, 2020; Springgay & Truman, 2018), the methodology developed in this study is defined by the reflexive integration of diverse positionalities and multiple epistemological perspectives. In this research, methodological choices are understood not as neutral tools but as ethically and epistemologically situated, shaped by the embodied and dialogic relationships among the researcher, participants, and context.

In disability-related creative practice research, many studies adopt single paradigms, such as descriptive phenomenology, autoethnography, or design-led participatory methods (Adams et al., 2017; Dubiel, 2022). While valuable, these approaches often privilege either theoretical abstraction or applied problem-solving, without fully integrating the ethical, sensory, and cultural dimensions of the work. This study challenges such separations by assembling a transdisciplinary framework that integrates CDS, phenomenology, Daoist philosophy, and collaborative artistic practice. Building on arguments for methodological approaches that move beyond epistemology to incorporate pragmatic and ethical commitments (Vodonick, 2016), the research proposes a reconfiguration in which embodied relationality, sensory plurality, and cultural dialogue form the core methodological principles. The novelty lies not only in combining these perspectives but in realigning research design with the lived and felt realities of disability art practice, thereby questioning ocular-centric assumptions and rigid theory-practice divides.

The following chapter demonstrates how this reflexive, transdisciplinary framework is operationalised through a mixed-methods design that attends to the sensory dynamics of collaborative processes with artists with visual impairment.

Chapter 4: Methods

4.1 Mixed-methods Design Overview

This study employed a two-phase mixed-methods design to investigate the creative processes of artists with visual impairment and the reception of their work across cultural contexts. The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches allowed for a multi-layered exploration of non-visual artistic practices, embodied sensory experience, and audience interpretation.

In Phase One, conducted in China in 2022, the researcher collaborated with four artists with visual impairment to co-develop four distinct art projects: non-visual photography, improvised music, improvised dance, and installation art. Each project was co-designed by the researcher collaborator and the visually impaired artist and explored how non-visual senses and differences in bodily perception and sensory orientation informed the artists' creative practices. Data were collected through observation, documentation, and semi-structured interviews and focused on the artists' sensory strategies, material interaction, and aesthetic decision-making.

Phase Two involved the public exhibition of the resulting artworks in four venues, one in China and three in New Zealand. The asymmetry in the number of exhibitions was primarily due to the differing pandemic conditions at the time of implementation. The Chinese exhibition took place in 2022, during a period of strict COVID-19 lockdowns and severe public health restrictions. These conditions significantly limited access to venues, equipment, and audiences, making it impractical to organise more than one event. In contrast, the New Zealand exhibitions were held in 2024, when the pandemic had largely subsided and public life had returned to relative normalcy. This enabled greater

flexibility in planning and implementation. The researcher's institutional affiliations and local partnerships in New Zealand further supported the organisation of multiple exhibitions.

During these exhibitions, data were collected from audience members through structured questionnaires (see Appendix E, English and Chinese versions). The purpose of this phase was to explore how cross-cultural audiences perceived and interpreted non-visual art. Additional attention was given to how embodied perception and disability were communicated and understood within different social and cultural frameworks. The qualitative data consisted of semi-structured interviews with four artists and open-ended survey responses from exhibition audiences. These were analysed using IPA and RTA, respectively. Quantitative survey data, including audiences' demographic information and closed-ended items, were examined using DSA.

This integration of qualitative and quantitative methods enabled a layered understanding of both production and reception within disability arts practices. The overall design reflects the transdisciplinary orientation of the study, integrating Disability Studies, phenomenology, Daoist philosophy, and creative arts practice, and is grounded in a theoretical framework that combines CDS, phenomenology, and Daoist philosophy.

4.1.1 Positioning the Researcher in the Research and Practice

In this research, the researcher was positioned as a collaborative creative practitioner, curator and investigator. This role was multifaceted, involving participation in various aspects of the project and facilitating the integration of theory and practice. Throughout the process, the researcher focused on investigating the artistic intentions and creative strategies of the artists with visual impairment, aiming to uncover their unique approaches and perspectives in engaging with non-visual sensory

experiences. To achieve this, the researcher worked closely with the artists to gain insights into their lifestyles and creative processes, co-developing non-visual interactive approaches and fostering greater diversity in artistic expression.

As a researcher, responsibilities include constructing the research framework, designing the methodology, and selecting suitable theoretical tools to guide the study's direction. Organising and implementing the research requires close collaboration with artists with visual impairment and the development of a range of artistic projects. Maintaining the ethical integrity of the study constitutes a central responsibility. During collaborative projects, the researcher ensured the protection of participants' rights and dignity, obtained informed consent, and respected their voluntary participation and privacy throughout the entire research process.

Moreover, conducting research and data collection were essential responsibilities. Primary research data were collected through semi-structured interviews, audience questionnaires, and detailed documentation of the artistic projects to ensure accuracy and completeness. The researcher integrated practical artistic creation with theoretical frameworks, particularly through interactions with the artists, employing theories such as phenomenology, Daoism, and embodiment to enrich the creative process. This integration involved analysing the relationship between academic theories and the artists' creative practices, which generated new scholarly insights into how non-visual sensory modalities contribute to creative expression. The study also demonstrated how cross-cultural theoretical frameworks, particularly Daoist philosophy and phenomenology, can be mobilised to support inclusive and multisensory approaches in disability arts.

To foster equitable collaborative practice, the researcher established an inclusive and respectful environment that enabled each artist to actively participate and clearly articulate individual creative intentions. In parallel, the researcher analysed the multidimensional data generated throughout the study, integrating these insights with relevant theoretical frameworks to derive academically meaningful conclusions and identify directions for future research.

As a collaborator with the artists with visual impairment, the researcher engaged in artistic creation, exploring how the artists utilised non-visual sensory interactions during the collaborative development process in order to investigate artistic diversity. Together with the artists, the researcher co-developed and realised artistic practices across various mediums, including photography, music, dance, and installation art, through a dialogical process that combined the artists' non-visual sensory insights with the researcher's artistic and curatorial expertise. These practices expressed personal creativity and emotions, reflecting the collaborative team's (the researcher and the artists) situated understanding and perception of the world at that particular moment and within the context of their shared creative process.

Through close collaborative creation, the researcher and the artists exchanged insights, inspired one another, and sought innovative creative methods and techniques to produce compelling and inclusive artworks. By leveraging the unique artistic perspectives and skills of each artist-researcher pair, the collaborations advanced the boundaries of both visual and non-visual artistic creation, thereby expanding the possibilities of artistic expression.

Additionally, as a curator, the researcher's role primarily involved planning, organising, and implementing art exhibitions. Based on the characteristics of the four artistic practices, the

backgrounds of the artists, and considerations regarding the audience, the researcher worked collaboratively with the artists to shape the exhibition themes and curatorial concepts. This process aimed to reflect the artists' creative intentions while fostering both audience engagement and intellectual depth. During the curatorial process, accessibility services and related facilities, such as audio descriptions and Braille explanations, were incorporated to provide an inclusive experience, particularly for audiences with visual impairment.

The curator coordinated various exhibition elements, including collaboration with venues, artists, and technical teams. Leveraging a design background and incorporating insights from discussions with the artists with visual impairment, the researcher personally designed posters, typography, and postcards. These visual components and layouts were tailored specifically to suit each exhibition space, thereby enhancing visual impact and audience engagement. Given that all four exhibitions took place in different locations, adjustments in spatial design were made accordingly to reflect both spatial characteristics and the perspectives of the artists.

Another role fulfilled by the researcher as a curator was to establish connections with the audience and collect their feedback and reflections during the exhibition. This involved accompanying the audience throughout the exhibition, providing detailed explanations of the artworks, and engaging in close communication with the audiences. Through these interactions, the researcher promoted public awareness and advocated for building an inclusive society that recognises and celebrates the artistic and creative potential of people with visual impairment. In addition, the researcher collected audience feedback through post-exhibition questionnaires to further inform the research.

4.2 Data Collection

Data were collected across two distinct phases of the research. Phase One involved four collaborative art practices conducted with artists with visual impairment in China. Phase Two consisted of four exhibitions held in China and New Zealand, from which audience feedback was gathered through structured questionnaires. The datasets generated from both phases include: (1) semi-structured interviews with artists, (2) documentation and observations from the collaborative processes, and (3) audience survey responses, and (4) the researcher's reflexive journal, which captured ongoing reflections on the creative, curatorial, and analytical processes. The recruitment of participants and the procedures for data collection are described in the following sections.

4.2.1 Participant Recruitment

To guide the recruitment of artists with visual impairment, the study adopted a working definition of an artist as a person engaged in creative practice in recognised art forms such as painting, sculpture, music, dance, literature, and more (Danto, 2013). In line with this understanding, participants were required to have prior experience in creative practice and to demonstrate openness and interest in alternative creative and collaborative processes. These artists were expected to be experts in the medium they used, possessing technical skills that extended beyond mere craftsmanship. Furthermore, the recruited artists were expected to demonstrate an openness to sharing their creative practice through the research process, with the aim of fostering greater public understanding of disability and non-visual art. While they were not required to be full-time or commercially practising artists, they needed to have a sustained engagement with their chosen medium and a willingness to explore collaborative and inclusive approaches to art-making.

The study involved two categories of participants: artists with visual impairment who engaged in the collaborative art practices, and audience members who participated in post-exhibition surveys. This section focuses on the recruitment of the participants. The recruitment posters are included in Appendix F. Different versions of the poster were used for recruiting visually impaired artists and audience participants. Since the recruitment of visually impaired artists in China was conducted online, the researcher employed both text-based messages and digital versions of the poster.

A. Phase One

A total of four artists with visual impairment participated in the collaborative practices. Snowball sampling was used to identify potential participants. In this method, one participant or informant recommends others who may be eligible or interested in joining the study (Naderifar et al., 2017). The recruitment process was iterative and progressed through informal referrals and organisational introductions, enabling access to a diverse group of artist participants with varying degrees of visual impairment, creative backgrounds, and lived experiences shaped by different regional contexts within China.

Due to the relatively small and closely connected nature of the visual impairment community in China, the researcher accessed potential participants through multiple recruitment pathways. One key strategy involved joining a national disability-focused research network called Disability Without Borders in early 2022, which facilitated access to a broader pool of participants and supportive contacts within the community.

Additional recruitment methods included the use of digital posters; targeted outreach to disability organisations, such as the China Disabled Persons' Federation; and communication with non-

governmental organisations serving blind and low-vision communities. Social media platforms, including WeChat groups and Weibo, were used to distribute recruitment information and reach wider audiences.

Through contact with official disability organisations (e.g., the One Plus One Disability Public Welfare Group) and WeChat communities (e.g., the Barrier-Free Unlimited group under the China Disabled Persons' Federation) in China, six artist participants (four males, two females) aged between 26 and 38 were recruited. These artists specialised in non-visual photography, music, installation art, and improvisational dance. Following four months of communication, four artists who identified as “legally blind” (with minimal light perception) were selected to participate in the collaborative projects, one dancer, one installation artist, one musician, and one photographer. The remaining two artists contributed through semi-structured interviews only due to geographic and scheduling constraints. Three of the interviews were conducted in person while the other three were conducted online.

After being fully informed about the study (see Appendix B), all participants provided informed consent to participate in the study and agreed to be identified by name (see Appendix C). Two signed physical consent forms while two confirmed their consent via video-recorded verbal agreement. The remaining two participants confirmed their consent in written form through WeChat messages, which were archived as screenshots and stored securely. Ethical approval was obtained for both the collaborative activities and the interview process (see Appendix A). Demographic details are summarised in Table 1, including art disciplines, years of professional experience, cause of vision loss, and self-reported support needs.

Table 1 Demographic information of the artists with visual impairment

<i>The artists</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Art form</i>	<i>Project title</i>	<i>Years of art experience</i>	<i>Years living with visual impairment</i>	<i>Visual impairment</i>	<i>Support needs in life and creation</i>
<i>Zhengqiang Jiang</i>	26	Male	Non-visual photography	Sunshine Workshop	7	16	Optic atrophy	Life (Y) Art (N)
<i>Ming Kong</i>	27	Male	Improvisational music	At Present	14	Since birth	Retina detachment	Life (Y) Art (N)
<i>Huiheng Su</i>	37	Male	Impromptu dance	Time	7	Since birth	Optic atrophy	Life (Y) Art (N)
<i>Zezhao Wang</i>	29	Male	Installation art	My XXX	11	22	Retinitis pigmentosa	Life (N) Art (N)
<i>Jia Xiao</i>	38	Female	Non-visual photography		8	18	Retinitis pigmentosa	Life (N) Art (N)
<i>Yanan Yu</i>	29	Female	Music/ Non-visual photography		4	17	Retinitis pigmentosa	Life (N) Art (N)

B. Phase Two

The exhibitions were open to the public and designed to be accessible to individuals from diverse communities, age groups, and professional backgrounds. Audience participants were gathered through a combination of printed posters and online social media platforms. For the exhibition held at Maanshan University in China, posters were prominently displayed across campus locations, including the main library's digital display screen and official communication channels managed by the university's Student Union. To enhance accessibility for the audiences with visual impairment, additional measures were implemented during the exhibition. These included QR codes linked to audio descriptions embedded in the documentary films and photographic works, Braille cards to support tactile engagement, and in-person verbal interpretation provided by the researcher. These strategies aimed to foster a multisensory and inclusive experience, ensuring that visitors with diverse access needs could engage meaningfully with the artworks and exhibition narratives.

In New Zealand, prior to the exhibitions, each venue conducted official promotion via institutional websites, printed posters, targeted email announcements circulated to university staff, students, and affiliated community groups. The researcher additionally promoted the exhibitions through various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Invitations were disseminated to prospective attendees one week prior to each event to enhance outreach and engagement. To further promote inclusivity and reach diverse communities, the researcher proactively contacted local disability and arts organisations, such as Blind Low Vision NZ and Boon Art NZ, encouraging participation from both people with visual impairment and the wider creative

community. No specific skills were required of audience members and all individuals were welcome to attend the exhibitions.

The demographic details provide contextual background for understanding the audience engagement with the exhibitions across both China and New Zealand. The wide age range and varied backgrounds of attendees indicate a broad public interest in the themes of disability, sensory experience, and inclusive art. A detailed summary of audience demographic characteristics is provided in Section 6.1 to support the analysis of audience responses. The following section details the data collection processes used to examine both the co-development of artists' creative practices and the audience's engagement with non-visual and multisensory exhibitions.

4.2.2 Data Collection

A. Collaborative Practice and Co-development of the Artists' Stories. Before commencing the four collaborative art projects, the participating artists engaged in detailed conversations with the researcher to determine the direction of each practice. These discussions covered the selection of specific art forms, the project titles, and the thematic meanings that each work sought to convey. These creative practices were developed based on sensory research, particularly from the perspective of embodied perceptions, and integrated multiple sensory modalities and multidimensional thinking.

During the art-making process, the researcher and artists co-developed narratives that reflected both perceptual strategies and sociocultural understandings of disability. These collaborative practices informed the researcher's reflexive insights into how lived experience shaped creative direction. Data were collected through a mixed-method approach combining creative, participatory, and field-based techniques. These included semi-structured interviews, behaviour

mapping, reflexive journals, and audio and video documentation. More than 187 GB of visual material, comprising primarily video footage and photographs, was generated during the four collaborative practices. The resulting dataset included interview transcripts, audio-visual documentation, field notes, and reflexive materials.

This section presents four collaborative art practices conducted as part of the first phase of data collection. Each practice involved a creative partnership between the researcher and an artist with visual impairment and was designed to explore a distinct non-visual artistic modality. The four practices included: a non-visual photography project, an improvisational music project, an improvisational dance project, and an installation art project. Each project is discussed in detail below, including the aims, participants, context, the creative processes, and data collection procedures.

Upon completion of the collaborative art practices, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participating artists, lasting approximately one hour. The interview content covered five areas: general background information about the artist, multisensory abilities, reflections on the creative process, multimedia experiences, and perspectives on disability (see Appendix D).

1. Project One: Non-visual photography – “Sunshine Workshop”

This project involved a non-visual photography collaborative project aimed at documenting the operational and creative processes of the Sunshine Workshop, a traditional handicraft studio located in Jiading District, Shanghai, China. As a site for the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage, the Sunshine Workshop comprises both a retail space and a training workshop for apprentices. Many apprentices are persons with disabilities, such as people with hearing and intellectual impairments, who engage in producing various straw crafts. The creative process was

subsequently edited by the researcher into a short, five-minute documentary film titled *Sunshine Workshop* (Ma, 2022b), available at: <https://youtu.be/SWQhBr4IAAdY>. All timecodes (mm:ss) mentioned below, and in subsequent project descriptions, refer to segments within the corresponding short documentary for each project.

The participating artist with visual impairment in this non-visual photography project was Zhengqiang Jiang, a postgraduate student at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (as of 2025). He is a 27-year-old Chinese male with eight years' experience in non-visual photography and is legally blind due to an acquired illness. Although he retains a minimal perception of light, he relies on a white cane or assistance from others for effective mobility.

The researcher established contact with Mr. Jiang through a Chinese audio description group. Prior to initiating the collaborative art practice, the researcher engaged in extensive discussions with Mr. Jiang concerning the artistic form, content, conceptual intentions, and specific photographic techniques. Mr. Jiang employed non-visual photography to capture the working process of the craftspeople and the surroundings, while the researcher simultaneously documented Mr. Jiang's creative process using photography and video. This occasion marked the first time both the researcher and Mr. Jiang conducted a non-visual photography session at the Sunshine Workshop.

Regarding the technique of non-visual photography, the researcher and Mr. Jiang engaged in thorough discussions focusing on specific and nuanced shooting methods. Understandings of non-visual photography vary among individuals. In this project, the researcher and Mr. Jiang proposed that non-visual photography encompasses two dimensions: first, photographic creation by the people with visual impairment; and second, photographic expression by sighted individuals using non-visual

sensory modalities. The core objective of this approach was to reveal the narrative behind the visual image.

Prior to the commencement of the project, Mr. Jiang and the researcher maintained extensive communication, both online and offline, regarding the content of the collaborative project, the planning of its implementation, and the anticipated presentation strategies for the exhibition. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown in China at that time, online communication played a key role in facilitating the project's progression and enabled the continuous exchange of ideas. During the initial planning stage, the research team collaboratively identified and refined the project theme through brainstorming sessions, ultimately selecting Shanghai's Sunshine Workshop as the primary shooting location. Mr. Jiang had previously met the founder of Sunshine Workshop during a community exchange event. The founder supported the project by introducing the site and the members during the filming process (Ma, 2022b, 00:26–00:58).

Sunshine Workshop, a for-profit organisation located in Jiading District, Shanghai, was at that time actively engaged in the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage of straw weaving. The workshop also employed people with disability, such as the hearing-impaired pattern designers. This encounter inspired the concept of the non-visual photography project, with a particular focus on the interaction between the photographer with visual impairment and the pattern designer with hearing impairment (Ma, 2022b, 03:24–04:40).

Before initiating the filming process, the researcher and Mr. Jiang discussed how non-visual photography could be adapted into a documentary format. Non-visual photography frequently approached subjects through storytelling, with rich contextual and narrative layers. This project

integrated documentary techniques into the narrative structure and emphasised the role of non-visual sensory experiences during the team's visit to Sunshine Workshop. The founder's spoken account offered both contextual information and narrative coherence, guiding the non-visual documentation process and shaping the interpretive focus of the project.

The recorded content included the owner's overview of the workshop, the photographic process conducted by Mr. Jiang and the researcher, their interaction with raw materials, the staff's explanation of the straw-weaving procedure, and exchanges between the team and the workshop's employees with disabilities. To document the process comprehensively, two complementary perspectives were recorded. The researcher used a handheld camera to continuously record the practice from a third-person perspective. Mr. Jiang explored the workshop space primarily through independent movement, occasionally requiring assistance or verbal cues to navigate certain areas during the creative process. Simultaneously, a panoramic Insta360 camera was mounted on the strap of Mr. Jiang's backpack to provide a first-person perspective (as shown in Figure 1), capturing his entire process of engaging with the environment through non-visual sensory input and operating the photographic equipment (Ma, 2022b, 00:59–01:54). The documentary footage captured from these two perspectives enabled a comparative analysis between non-visual photographic methods employed by Mr. Jiang and the visually guided documentation approach taken by the researcher.



Figure 1 Mr. Jiang's first-person perspective recorded using a 360-degree camera.

2. Project Two: Impromptu dance – "Time"

This collaborative artistic practice involved an improvisational dance project between the researcher and Huiheng Su. Mr. Su was an improvisational dancer based in Guangzhou, China, and also worked as a psychological counsellor. After being introduced to Mr. Su through the Chinese disability research group Disability Without Borders, the researcher invited him to take part in one of the collaborative artistic projects in this research. Prior to the initiation of the project, the researcher and Mr. Su engaged in several online and offline discussions, during which they explored Mr. Su's personal and artistic background as well as their respective perspectives on disability and dance. The creative process was edited by the researcher into a documentary short film titled *Time* (Ma, 2022d), with a duration of approximately 12 minutes, available at: <https://youtu.be/BelawENydRI>.

Mr. Su, a 37-year-old individual who is legally blind in China, had very limited light perception and relied on a white cane or assistance from volunteers for navigation. Mr. Su lost his vision during

childhood due to illness and the limited availability of adequate medical care at the time. Before becoming a psychological counsellor, he had worked as a blind masseur. Until 2023, he held multiple roles, as an improvisational dancer, psychological counsellor, and barista at Shouxin Coffee in Guangzhou.

The Shouxin Coffee initiative was a public welfare project launched in 2018 by the Hemu Disability Public Welfare Innovation Centre in Guangzhou. This initiative provided professional barista training for the people with visual impairment, using coffee as a platform for social interaction. Since its inception, over 200 individuals with visual impairment had been trained, and some secured employment at Shouxin Coffee. As of the time of writing, the café employed three visually impaired baristas and regularly hosted hand-brewed coffee workshops aimed at fostering greater public understanding of the coffee-making process (Pengpai News, 2021). Sadly, Mr. Su passed away in 2023 due to an accident.

On the day of the formal improvisational dance performance, Mr. Su invited two friends to accompany him: Xiao Ru (pseudonym), who had a physical disability, and A Qiang (pseudonym), who had an intellectual disability (Ma, 2022d, 00:16–00:21). Together, Mr. Su and his friends travelled to Zhuhai Park in Guangzhou, where the performance was collaboratively carried out with the researcher. Both friends also contributed to the documentation process by assisting with third-person camera work, including adjusting the camera position and operating recording controls.

Given the researcher's limited familiarity with improvisational dance as an art form, Mr. Su invited the researcher to attend a professional improvisational dance session hosted by ++Body, a Guangzhou-based organisation founded by a Hong Kong improvisational dancer. ++Body organised

weekly contact improvisation workshops at various venues. This experience introduced the researcher to the fundamentals of improvisational dance and provided a deeper understanding of its movement language and conceptual foundations.

After several collaborative discussions, Mr. Su and the researcher selected “time” as the central topic of the collaborative project. The performance explored the metaphorical “encounter” between the past and present selves within parallel temporal spaces. The thematic concept reflected on solitude at birth, the pursuit of connection throughout life, and a return to solitude in death. Through dance, the performance interpreted past, present, and future as temporal states, expressing the convergence of past and future selves and a return to the self through embodied movement.

The performance was divided into three parts to convey an interpretation of the present moment. The first part featured Mr. Su’s solo performance, in which he expressed his understanding of his past life through embodied engagement with the surrounding environment (Ma, 2022d, 03:53–05:05). The second part involved the researcher’s solo performance, conveying an interpretation of present life (Ma, 2022d, 05:09–06:20). The third part presented a dance interaction between Mr. Su and the researcher, where the intertwining of body movements was used to articulate their aspirations for the future (Ma, 2022d, 08:30–11:22). Throughout the performance, Mr. Su and the researcher relied on non-visual senses to perceive time and the environment, mentally reconstructing their past and future while attuning to the present surroundings and natural elements. This multisensory engagement deepened the expressive quality of the performance, resulting in a powerful expression of multisensory experience.

The creative process was recorded using video from two perspectives: a first-person view (Ma, 2022d, 00:23–03:37) and a third-person view (Ma, 2022d, 03:55–11:48). Both Mr. Su and the researcher wore Insta360 panoramic cameras around their necks to capture their own dance movements as well as those of their collaborator. Additionally, a camera mounted on a tripod was employed to record the entire performance from a third-person angle (see Figure 2).



Figure 2 Video stills of the dance process showing three perspectives: third-person (left), researcher (centre), and Mr. Su, dancer with visual impairment (right).

3. Project Three: Improvisational music – “At Present”

This project involved an online collaborative improvisational music practice between the researcher and Ming Kong, a legally blind Chinese musician who was studying postgraduate and working in the United States. Despite the geographical separation, the researcher and Mr. Kong utilised various tools and equipment to express their current emotions and affective states during the collaborative process. The creative process was edited by the researcher into a documentary short film titled *At Present* (Ma, 2022c), lasting slightly over seven and a half minutes, available at: <https://youtu.be/ioWBVLb7aHs>.

Prior to the formal performance, the researcher and Mr. Kong engaged in multiple in-depth discussions that addressed Mr. Kong’s experience with visual impairment, his personal and professional background, career aspirations, and specific plans for the collaborative art project. Mr.

Kong lost most of his vision during early childhood (approximately between the ages of one and two) due to a combination of factors, including a high fever, delayed access to medical care owing to his rural location, and an ensuing medical dispute. By age twelve, he completely lost his sight following a corneal complication caused by a bacterial infection. At the time of the research (2025), Mr. Kong was legally blind with minimal light perception.

Given his early-onset visual impairment, Mr. Kong's family, concerned about his future, encouraged him to pursue musical training with the hope that he could establish a career through music. As a result, he began studying music at a young age, actively participated in music competitions, and later joined the China Disabled People's Performing Art Troupe, performing nationally and internationally. This extensive background contributed to Mr. Kong's exceptional musical performance and composition abilities. Although only 28 years old in 2025, he already possessed 15 years of performance and professional experience.

In addition to music, Mr. Kong exhibited an exploratory interest in other art forms. During discussions with the researcher, who had an academic and professional background in painting and design, Mr. Kong expressed curiosity about visual art and later experimented with painting using non-visual sensory modalities. He described the experience as highly engaging and creatively fulfilling.

During the creative process, differences in life backgrounds, personal experiences, and physical environments between Mr. Kong and the researcher influenced their respective interpretations and understandings of music. Consequently, the researcher and Mr. Kong chose to centre the collaboration on improvisational music, guided by key concepts such as the present moment, improvisation, and emotional resonance. The central theme, titled *At Present*, reflected the

temporal and environmental conditions experienced during the performance. For instance, the researcher was located in a rural setting in China during summer evenings, where the environmental sound of insects created a calm and soothing atmosphere. In contrast, Mr. Kong, the musician collaborator based in the United States, reported feeling anxious, as he was preparing for a major solo performance the following day. These differing affective states were integrated into the music through improvisational elements.

From the researcher's perspective as a practitioner from a different artistic discipline, the collaborative process was both fascinating and intellectually stimulating. However, the lack of formal musical training posed certain challenges. To address this, Mr. Kong encouraged the researcher to explore soundscapes in various environments and experiment with everyday objects capable of producing diverse auditory textures. Following this guidance, the researcher conducted exploratory fieldwork by recording in multiple locations, including supermarkets, outdoor natural environments, and local creative markets, to capture and reflect on the sensory and acoustic characteristics of each setting. Drawing inspiration from these settings, the researcher's father crafted a series of handmade instruments from bamboo, cutting the material into segments of varying thicknesses and lengths, and drilling holes to enhance resonance (Ma, 2022c, 00:10–00:39). These instruments were then paired with self-made ceramic components, produced using raw porcelain forms glazed with various materials and kiln-fired.

For the final performance, Mr. Kong selected the violin, his preferred instrument, while the researcher utilised 11 pieces of handmade bamboo instruments of differing dimensions, along with three ceramic pieces, to contribute a complementary auditory layer to the performance (see top and

bottom images in Figure 3). Before recording the final performance, Mr. Kong and the researcher conducted three preparatory sessions to discuss rhythm, sequencing, and integration strategies for the diverse instruments. Mr. Kong and the researcher eventually agreed on a segmented format, beginning with a solo performance by the researcher (Ma, 2022c, 02:12–02:39), followed by the collaborative performance between Mr. Kong and the researcher (Ma, 2022c, 02:40–04:37).

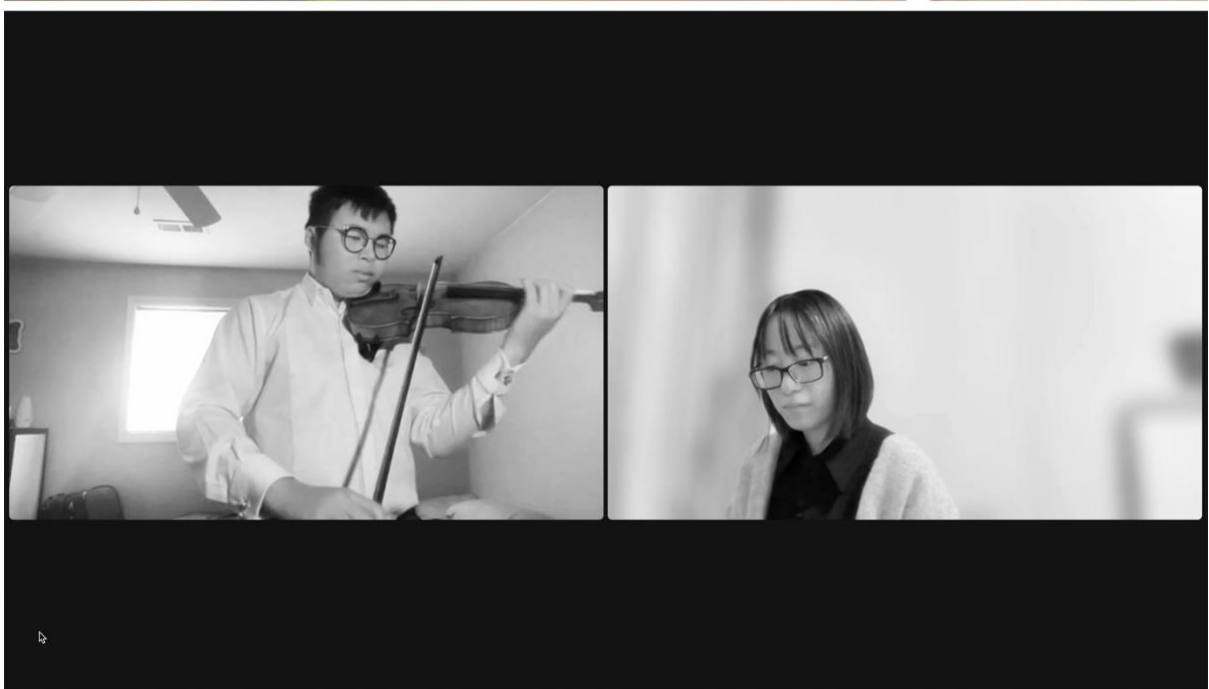


Figure 3 The bamboo and ceramic instruments handcrafted by the researcher (top). Screenshot from a Zoom meeting of Mr. Kong and the researcher performing online (bottom).

Given the online nature of the project, sound recording posed technical challenges. Since Mr. Kong was based in the United States and the researcher in China, asynchronous recording risked audio misalignment due to internet latency. To mitigate this, the team used Zoom for real-time collaboration, while the researcher simultaneously recorded video from two angles to capture the performance and post-performance reflections (Ma, 2022c, 04:47–05:55). Mr. Kong also recorded his segment using personal high-quality audio equipment. This multi-source recording strategy served as a contingency plan, allowing the team to select the best audio and video sources during post-production editing.

4. Project Four: Installation art – “My XXX”

The fourth collaborative project was an installation art practice created by Zezhao Wang and the researcher. The creative process was edited by the researcher into a documentary short film titled *My XXX*, nearly seven and a half minutes (Ma, 2022a), available at <https://youtu.be/ExQJdW-Px-4>. Mr. Wang is a 29-year-old freelance artist across various art creation bases in Guangzhou, China. Prior to the official launch of the project, Mr. Wang and the researcher engaged in multiple discussions addressing Mr. Wang’s personal and artistic background, his perspectives on disability, and his vision for future tactile art. Born with retinitis pigmentosa, Mr. Wang retained partial light perception. Under specific conditions, he could perceive coloured light, particularly from materials like the reflective laser paper used during the artistic creation process. While most other visual elements, such as low-contrast surfaces, dim lighting, or non-reflective objects, remained imperceptible to him. In daily life, he navigated using a white cane. The researcher first encountered Mr. Wang during the artist recruitment process for this study. Mr. Wang had extensive experience in tactile-based installation art residency projects and had previously exhibited his works on several occasions.

Following several brainstorming sessions, the researcher and Mr. Wang named the installation art project *Life Filter – My XXX*, conceptualised as an interactive installation artwork. The project centred on the theme of the social persona, examining how individuals navigate multiple roles in society, with outward behaviours and appearances often masking or conflicting with their internal sense of self. These personas were shaped by internal thoughts, environmental influences, personality traits, and external perceptions. The researcher and Mr. Wang conceptualised identity as a multidimensional construct and analysed it through five aspects: the original self, family background, external personality traits, internal personality traits, and the self as perceived by others. The artwork was structured as a three-dimensional model, integrating both horizontal and vertical dimensions. Horizontally, it presented different perspectives of an individual's persona; vertically, it explored diverse family backgrounds in China, such as urban, rural, middle-class, and single-parent families, each represented through specific materials.

During the material selection phase, Mr. Wang and the researcher visited local markets in Guangzhou to explore and experiment with tactile materials. This process was documented through first-person video recording (Ma, 2022a, 00:15–01:08). The footage captures their non-visual sensory engagement, emotional responses to various textures, and discussions about how each material might symbolically relate to distinct aspects of personality. The researcher and Mr. Wang spent an entire day examining suitable paper, fabrics, tactile surfaces, and construction components. The final production took place in an artist's studio, with the complete process recorded using a tripod-mounted camera. These recordings documented Mr. Wang's artistic process and his interactive collaboration with the researcher (Ma, 2022a, 01:09–06:28).

For the exhibition, the researcher and Mr. Wang employed a human-shaped acrylic template as the base, onto which different materials were layered to represent various dimensions of personality (Ma, 2022a, 06:29–07:09). For example, laser paper symbolised an energetic, outgoing external persona, while layered soft fabrics represented a gentle yet multifaceted internal character. Materials were categorised into two sets, each associated with distinct Chinese persona labels, combining typographic design in both Chinese and English. These material categories were further distinguished by unique textures and tactile qualities. Exhibition visitors were invited to select and layer materials according to their own interpretations, thereby constructing personalised human-shaped installations.

In the Chinese exhibition, the typography design was printed on transparent glass paper (see Figure 4). However, due to shipping damage, the material was replaced in the New Zealand exhibition with magnetic-backed cards, which enabled easy selection and attachment to the acrylic template (see Figure 5).



Figure 4 The final outcomes of the installation art in China.



Figure 5 Different materials for installation art in New Zealand exhibitions.

5. Semi-structured interview

To analyse in detail how participants perceived and understood what occurred within the collaborative projects, this research employed semi-structured interviews to gather data on various phenomena arising from the artistic practices and participants' reflections. This approach laid the foundation for data analysis using the IPA research method, as semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate means for collecting data in IPA studies (Smith, 2009). IPA focuses on how individuals make sense of their lived experiences, and the interviews aimed to capture participants' personal interpretations of embodiment and artistic expression. The flexible interview structure also allowed the researcher to respond to emerging themes, fostering a dialogic and participant-led process.

Before each collaborative project commenced, the researcher engaged in separate online discussions with the participating artists to co-develop the artistic concept, form, and process design

for the work. These preparatory conversations reflected and consolidated both the artists' and the researcher's creative intentions, ensuring that the projects aligned with the participants' artistic visions as well as practical considerations. Following the creation of the artworks, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with four artists with visual impairment, each lasting approximately one and a half hours. The interview for the non-visual photography project took place in Shanghai while those for the improvisational dance and installation art projects were conducted in Guangzhou. Since the improvisational music project was conducted online, with the artist located in the United States and the researcher in China, the interview for this project was held via Zoom.

In addition, during the artist recruitment phase, the researcher interviewed two other artists with visual impairment: Ms. Xiao, a legally blind non-visual photographer and non-visual make-up artist from Shanghai, and Ms. Yu, a legally blind musician based in the United Kingdom. Both interviews were conducted online and lasted approximately one hour. Notably, because the interviews for the improvisational dance and installation art projects were conducted at the same location, there was interaction between the dancer and the installation artist, extending the session to approximately two hours.

The semi-structured interview method lies between structured and unstructured formats, combining the standardised structure of the former with the flexibility of the latter. This approach involved a pre-designed interview framework, while allowing the researcher to adjust the sequence and depth of questions in response to participants' answers. Given the diverse backgrounds, personal experiences, and reflexive insights of the artists with visual impairment, this interview format proved well-suited to investigating complex, multidimensional issues. It enabled participants to express

themselves freely and allowed the researcher to capture their perspectives in a nuanced and comprehensive manner (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Prior to producing the documentary materials, the researcher drafted a general outline of questions and prepared preliminary notes. During the formal interviews, questions were added or modified depending on the discussion's direction and emerging themes. The interview content focused on two major domains: the collaborative art practices jointly developed by the artists with visual impairment and the researcher, and broader societal contexts, including disability-related topics and accessibility issues. Specific themes included background information, such as the cause of blindness and current living conditions; the use and interaction of non-visual senses in artistic practice; the application of various artistic media; and the artists' perspectives on disability and inclusive society.

These topics were also designed to align with the study's methodological foundations: discussions of sensory perception and lived experience reflect the phenomenological orientation; issues of access and disability identity resonate with CDS; and questions concerning instinctive sensory engagement and the relationship between artists and the environments are informed by Daoist philosophy, which values intuitive harmonisation with natural rhythms and non-hierarchical modes of being. Appendix D presents the basic interview framework, which was modified during interviews to suit participants' responses, including changes to the question order and the inclusion of follow-up questions.

B. Exhibitions. A total of four exhibitions were held as part of this research, one exhibition in China followed by three exhibitions in New Zealand. The exhibition in China took place at Maanshan University in Anhui over two weeks in 2022, with the duration shortened due to COVID-19 lockdown.

In New Zealand, three exhibitions were hosted at distinct venues: the Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts (GAPA) at the University of Waikato, the Nancy Caiger Gallery in the Meteor Theatre in Hamilton city centre, and the public place in Division of Health, Engineering, Computing, and Science at the University of Waikato.

Although the creative projects were developed collaboratively with artists with visual impairment, the exhibitions were presented as solo exhibitions in the sense that they were curated and structured as a synthesis of this doctoral research rather than as showcases of individually authored artistic outcomes. Specifically, the exhibitions functioned as reflective research presentations that brought together co-created artworks, process documentation, and analytical materials generated throughout the project. The exhibitions also served as research sites in which audience engagement and interpretation were systematically observed and documented. Accordingly, the term *solo exhibition* shown in the posters (Figure 13, 16 and 20) is used to denote the authorship of the research design and curatorial framework, while the artworks themselves are explicitly acknowledged as co-authored with the participating artists.

The aim of these exhibitions was to deepen public understanding of art and creative process created by artists with visual impairment, which also addressed the core research questions (as mentioned in Section 1.2):

- RQ 3: How can the dual perspectives of the participant-researcher, as collaborator, co-developer, and curator, and the artists with visual impairment be integrated into creative practice as research?

- RQ 4: How do the multi-media and multisensory artistic practices of artists with visual impairment shape audience understandings of culture, art, and disability?

Exhibition in China

The exhibition in China was held from 13 to 26 November 2022 at Maanshan University in Anhui Province, which showcased the researcher's collaborative projects with all four artists with visual impairment. Figure 6 provides an overview of the exhibition layout, including both front and top view perspectives. The display featured five posters, as illustrated in Figure 7. The first poster served as the main display, presenting essential information about the project. It included an overview of the entire initiative, details regarding the location and timeline, copyright information, and a QR code linking to both the documentary and the questionnaire survey. The remaining four posters provided detailed descriptions of each collaborative art practice, including information on the researcher, project titles, artistic categories, copyright statements, and QR codes directing viewers to the audience questionnaire.

The exhibition presented a diverse array of artworks, including four documentary films (accessible online via QR codes), 39 photographs, 40 Braille reflection cards (featuring the artists' handwritten reflections in both English and Chinese Braille), and 10 sets of postcards, comprising a total of 60 individual pieces.



Figure 6 Front view and top view of the exhibition in China.



Figure 7 Five posters displayed in the Chinese exhibition.

Photographs were used to illustrate both the creative processes of the collaborative practices and the final artworks produced in the projects. Figure 8 presented a selection of these photographs. The exhibition was organised into four distinct sections, each corresponding to one of the four art practices. Each section was introduced by an information board (see Figure 9), which included the title

of the practice, key visual elements, and relevant keywords designed to guide the audience's understanding.



Figure 8 Some photographs captured and showcased at the exhibition in China.



Figure 9 Information board for each collaborative project.

Braille cards (see Figure 10) were produced in both English and Chinese Braille versions, each accompanied by text translations in both English and Chinese. The cards presented reflections from six artists with visual impairment and the researcher, with the Braille content handwritten by one of

the artists, Zhengqiang Jiang. These reflections were derived from the artists' interview transcripts and the researcher's own reflexive notes. Collectively, the exhibition's artistic displays, including four documentary films, photographs, and Braille cards, offered a diverse and inclusive multi-sensory experience.

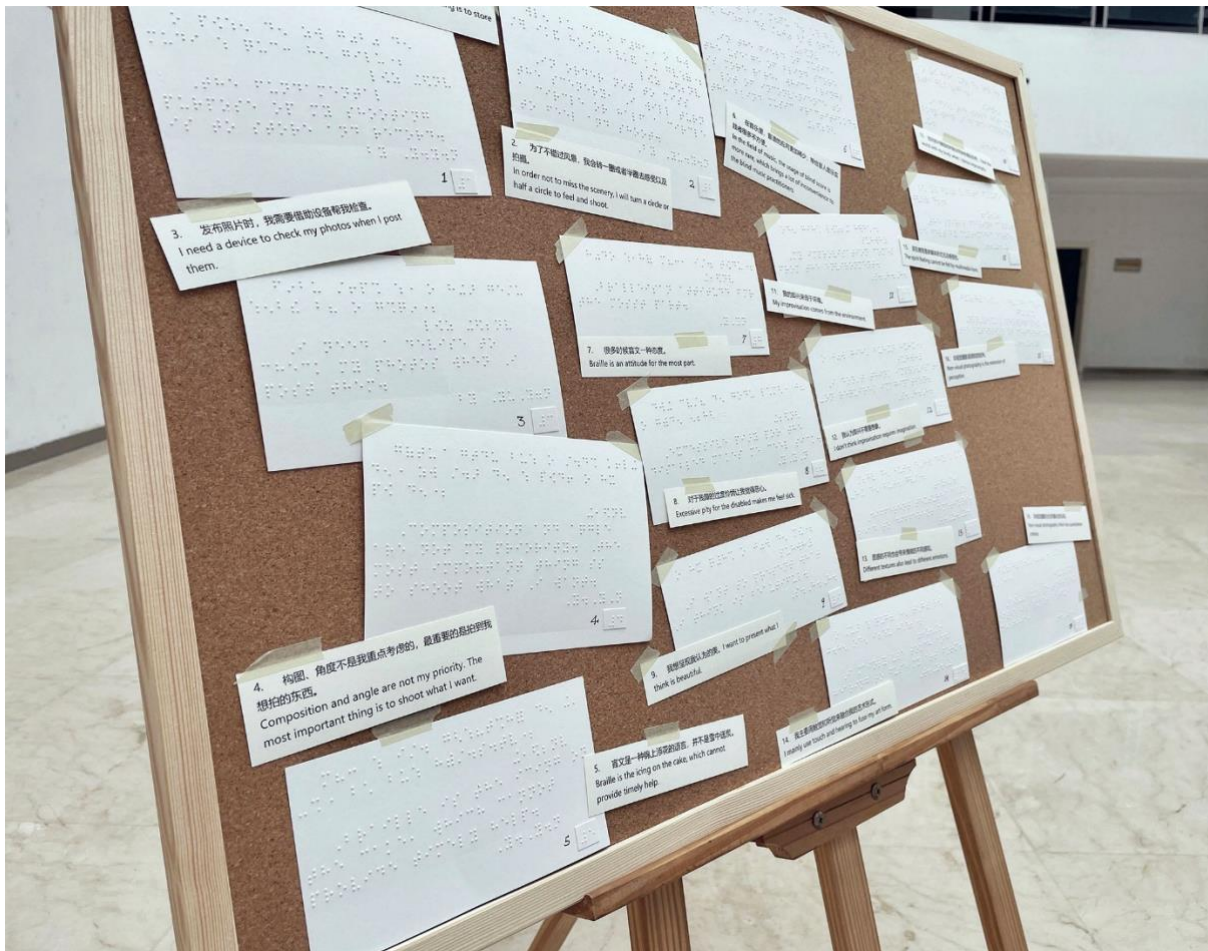


Figure 10 Braille cards present reflections from the artists and the researcher.

The exhibition route (see Figure 11) began with an overview of the general content, followed by a guided tour of the small tables and Braille cards. Visitors were then encouraged to scan the QR codes on the posters to access the documentary and complete a questionnaire. Due to the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, video playback was excluded from the physical exhibition and was instead made accessible online via QR code. The exhibition was intentionally designed to be

inclusive, providing tactile engagement for the visitors with visual impairment through the Braille cards while the documentary films and questionnaire accommodated both auditory and visual senses, thereby ensuring accessibility for all attendees.

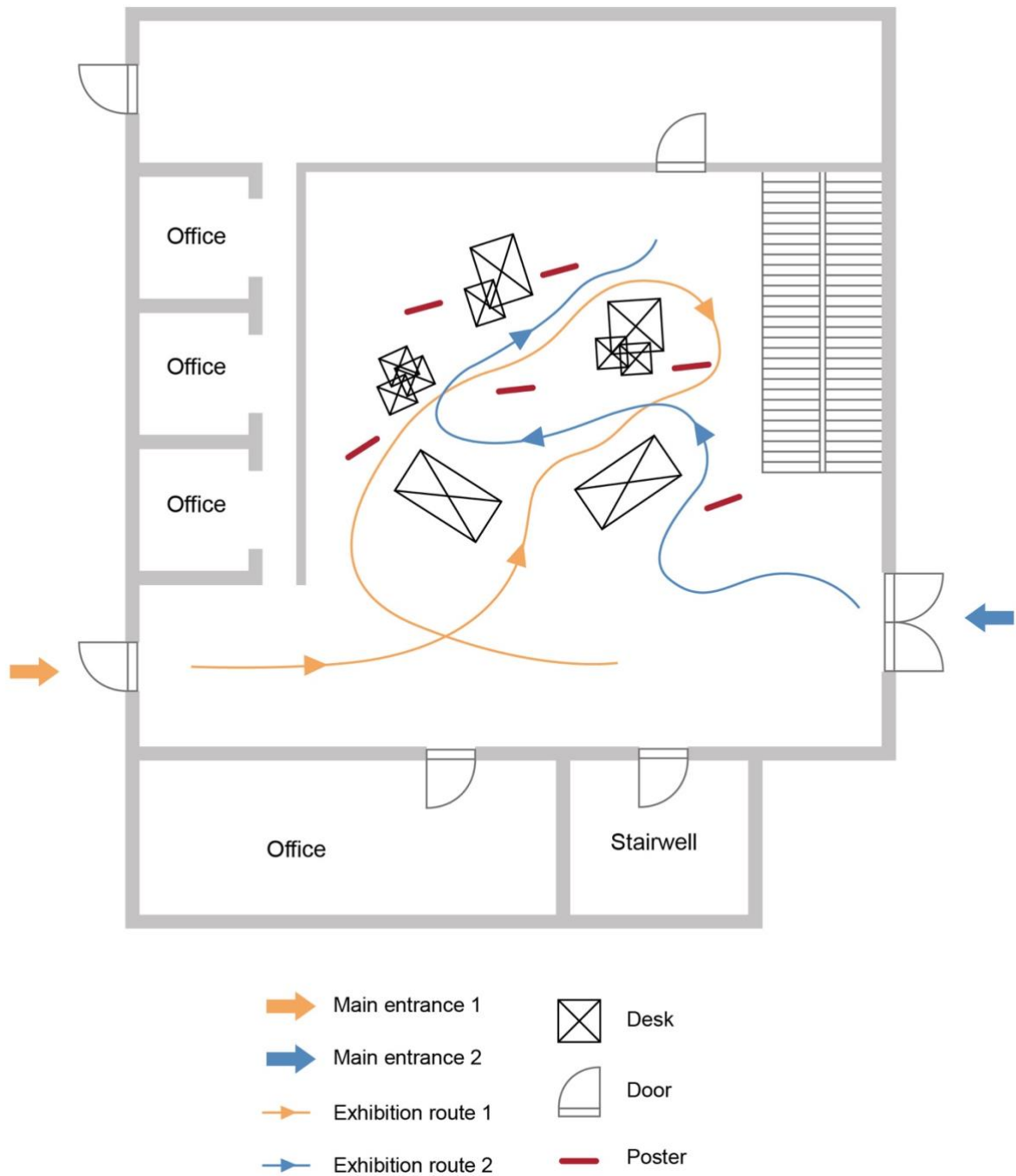


Figure 11 The visiting route of the Chinese exhibition.

Exhibitions in New Zealand

The three exhibitions in New Zealand featured distinct layouts, shaped by the specific spatial constraints of each venue. The exhibited works included a main exhibition poster, an information design banner, sub-posters for each project, informational hint boards, four documentary films with original soundtracks and bilingual subtitles (English and Chinese) screened on televisions or projectors, 40 photographs, an installation artwork, 40 Braille reflection cards (containing handwritten content in both English and Chinese Braille), and 10 sets of postcards (totalling 60 individual pieces) (see Appendix G).

Printed Braille description cards were placed adjacent to each photograph, accompanied by large-print text to facilitate viewing for individuals with low vision. These Braille descriptions were produced by the researcher at the Blind Low Vision NZ Auckland branch. Blind Low Vision NZ is a member-driven organisation operating under the governance of the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind, which offers both practical assistance and emotional support to individuals experiencing vision loss. Serving people across the life course, from early childhood to older adulthood, the organisation supports members with a broad spectrum of visual impairment, ranging from partial sight to total blindness (Blind Low Vision, 2024).

Each Braille print consisted of two components: a raised Braille section intended for tactile reading and a printed section on copy paper containing English text. The Braille paper differed from standard paper, comprising two layers, an adhesive transparent layer and a backing plate. The raised Braille dots were embossed on the transparent layer, while flat black Braille dots were printed on the

underlying paper alongside the English text (see Figure 12). Additionally, a QR code was placed beside the installation artwork, enabling visitors to access an audio explanation of the piece. This design enhanced accessibility for blind and low-vision individuals, contributing to a more inclusive viewing experience.

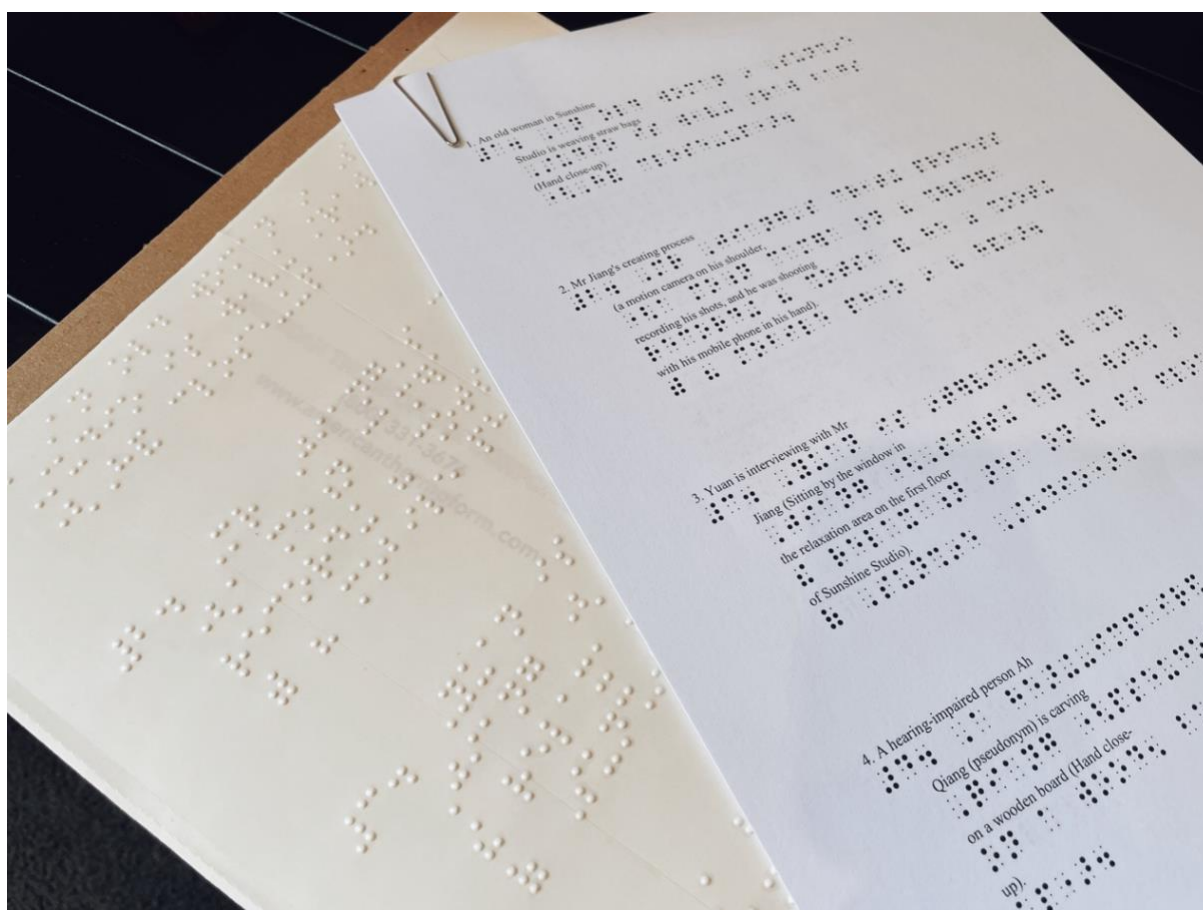


Figure 12 The printed Braille descriptions.

1. The exhibition in Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts

The exhibition at the GAPA, University of Waikato, was held from 28 February to 11 March 2024. The exhibition poster (see the left side of Figure 13) presented key information, including the title, dates, location, and the names of the contributors. An opening event with Māori greetings took place on 28 February. Invitations to the event (see the right side of Figure 13) were distributed to

potential attendees on 14 February 2024. Prior to the exhibition, promotional materials were published on the official website of GAPA (Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts, 2024).

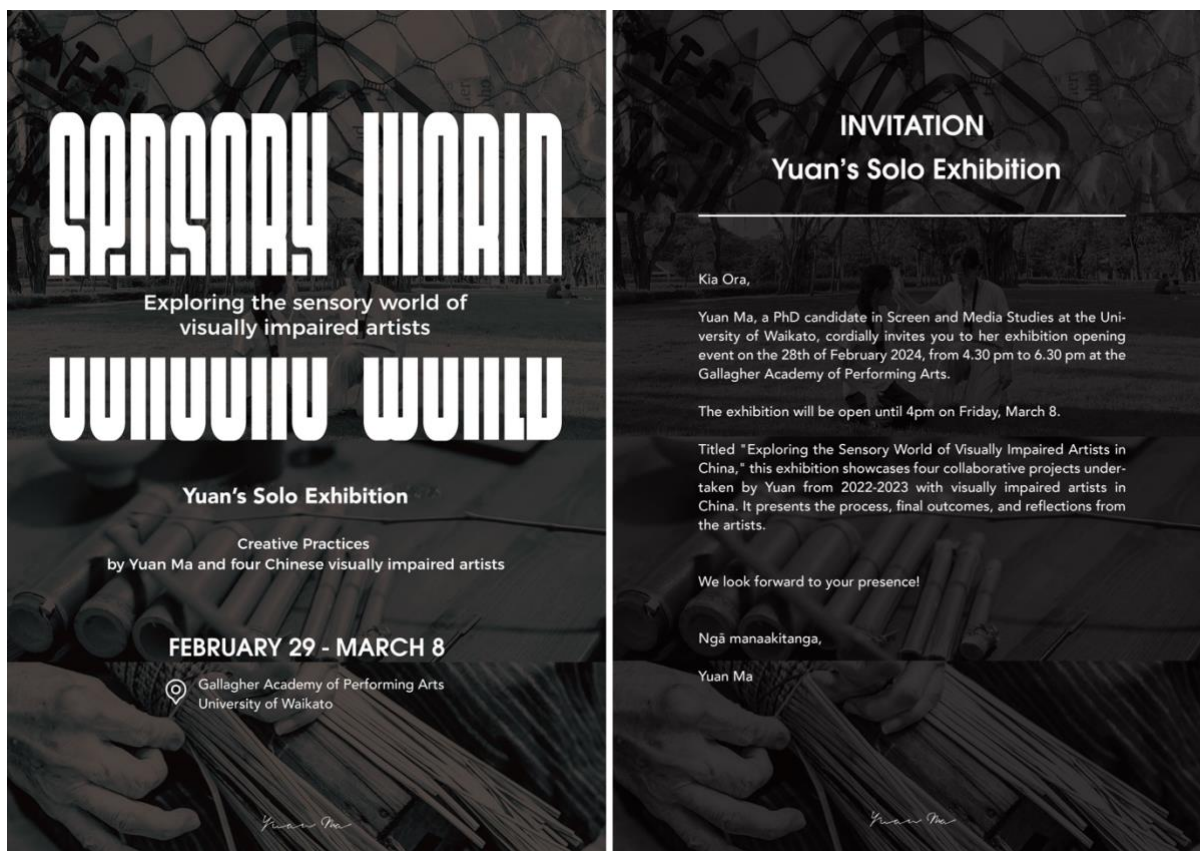


Figure 13 The poster and the invitation of the exhibition in GAPA.

All exhibition materials, including the main exhibition poster, an information design banner, sub-posters for each project, informational hint boards, four documentary films (screened on two televisions), photographs, an installation artwork, Braille reflection cards (featuring handwritten content in both English and Chinese Braille, see the right side of Figure 14), postcards, as well as Braille and English text descriptions corresponding to the photographic works, were displayed in the main exhibition area near the GAPA main entrance (see the left side of Figure 14). The opening event of the exhibition featured a Māori greeting delivered by Associate Professor Karen Barbour, Head of the

School of Arts, Law, Psychology, and Social Sciences at the University of Waikato. Figure 15 shows the visitor route of the exhibition.



Figure 14 The exhibition space of GAPA, showcasing the process of collaborative practices.

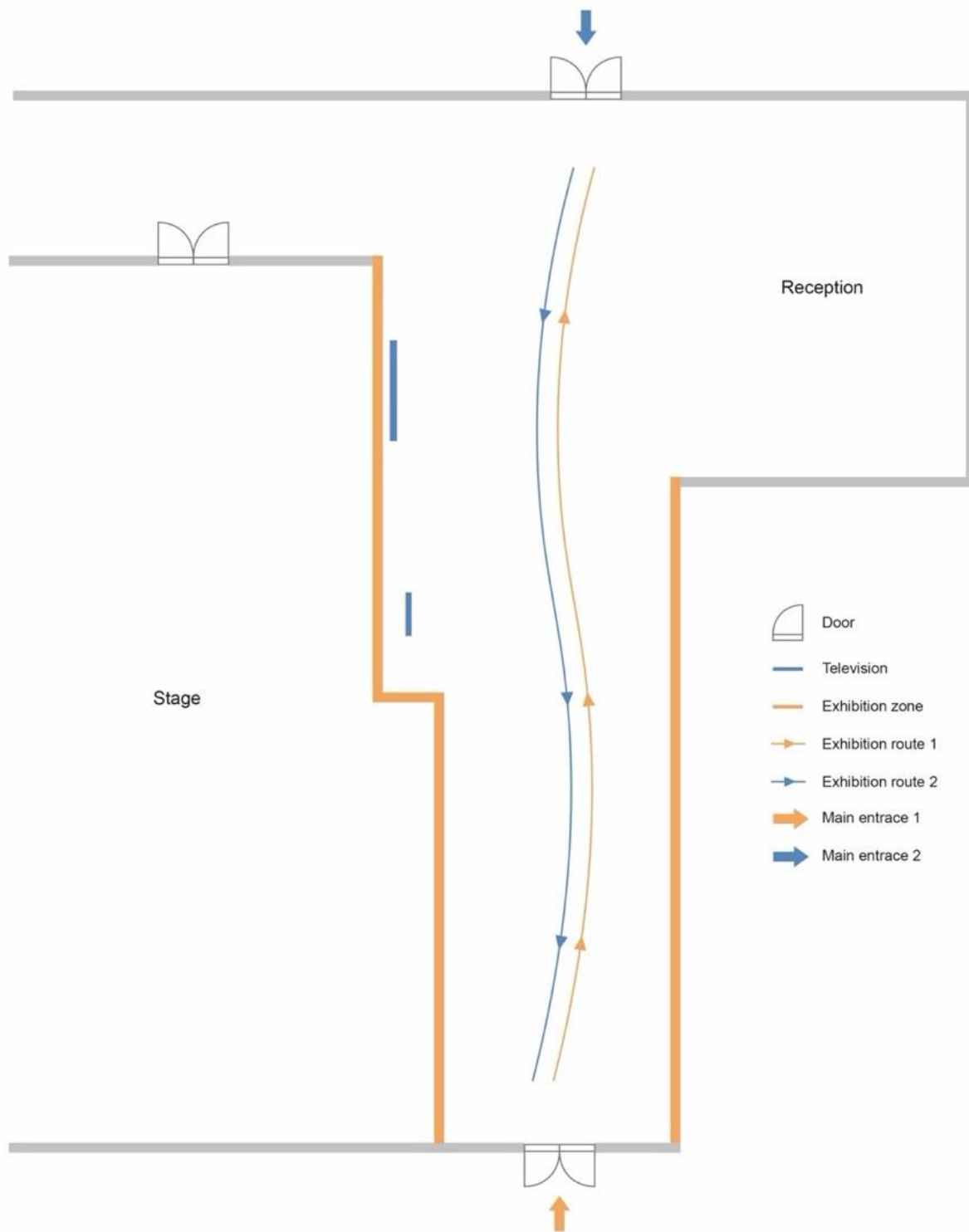


Figure 15 The visiting route of the exhibition in the space of GAPA.

2. The exhibition at the Meteor Theatre

The exhibition at the Meteor Theatre ran from 13 March to 1 April 2024. The exhibition poster (see the left side of Figure 16) presented key information, including the title, dates, and location. The Meteor Theatre is one of New Zealand's largest and most well-known "Black Box" theatres, with a dedicated gallery space known as the Nancy Caiger Gallery.

An opening event was held on 13 March 2024. Invitations (see the right side of Figure 16) were sent to potential attendees on 7 March. The event was promoted through various platforms, including the Creative Waikato website (Creative Waikato, 2024), the official Meteor Theatre website (Meteor Theatre, 2024), and as a Facebook event (Ma, 2024).

The exhibition space at the Meteor Theatre was divided into two main sections. One section featured the display of artworks, including photographic works mounted on the wall, the installation art, Braille reflection cards, and accompanying textual descriptions (see Figure 17). Unlike the other exhibition venues, the Nancy Caiger Gallery featured another dedicated video screening room. This space was furnished with comfortable seating to create a relaxed environment for viewing the documentary films (see Figure 18). Figure 19 shows the visitor route of the exhibition.

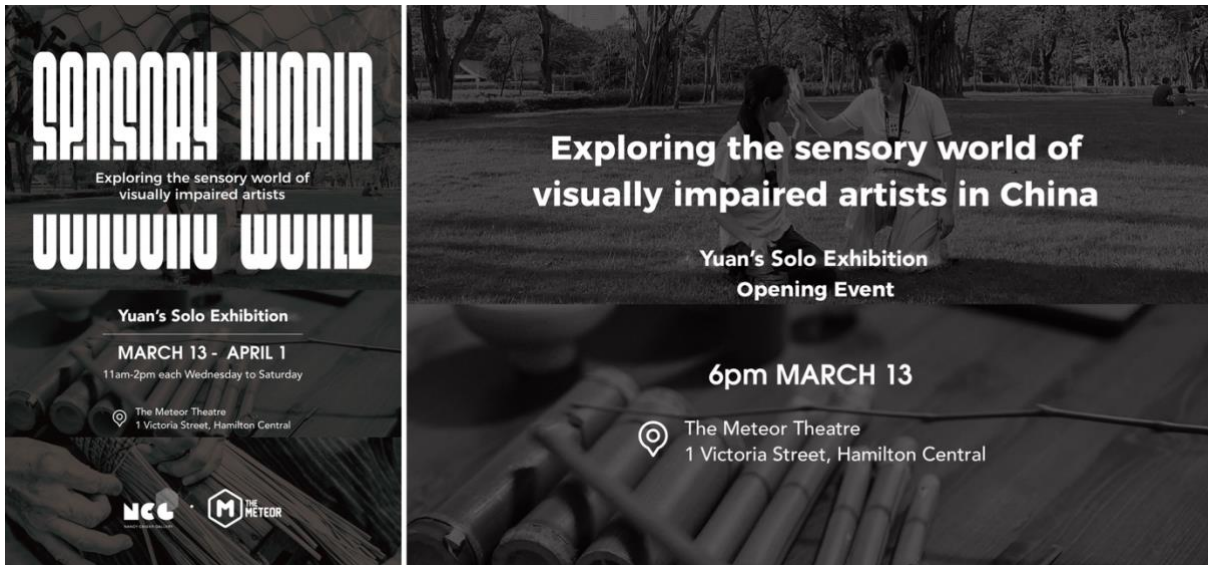


Figure 16 The poster and the opening event invitation in the Meteor Theatre.



Figure 17 The space of the exhibition in the Meteor Theatre.

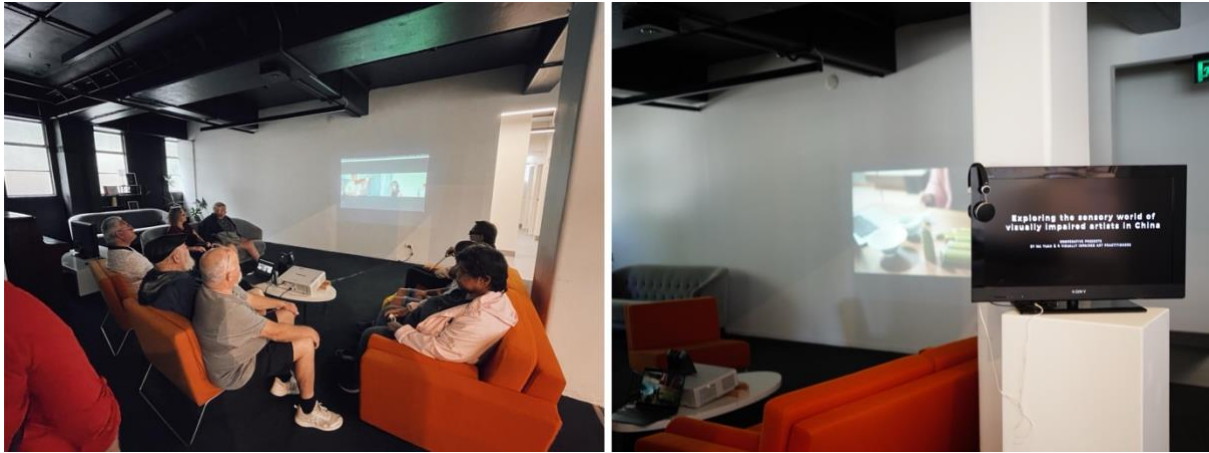


Figure 18 The area dedicated to the screening of documentary films.

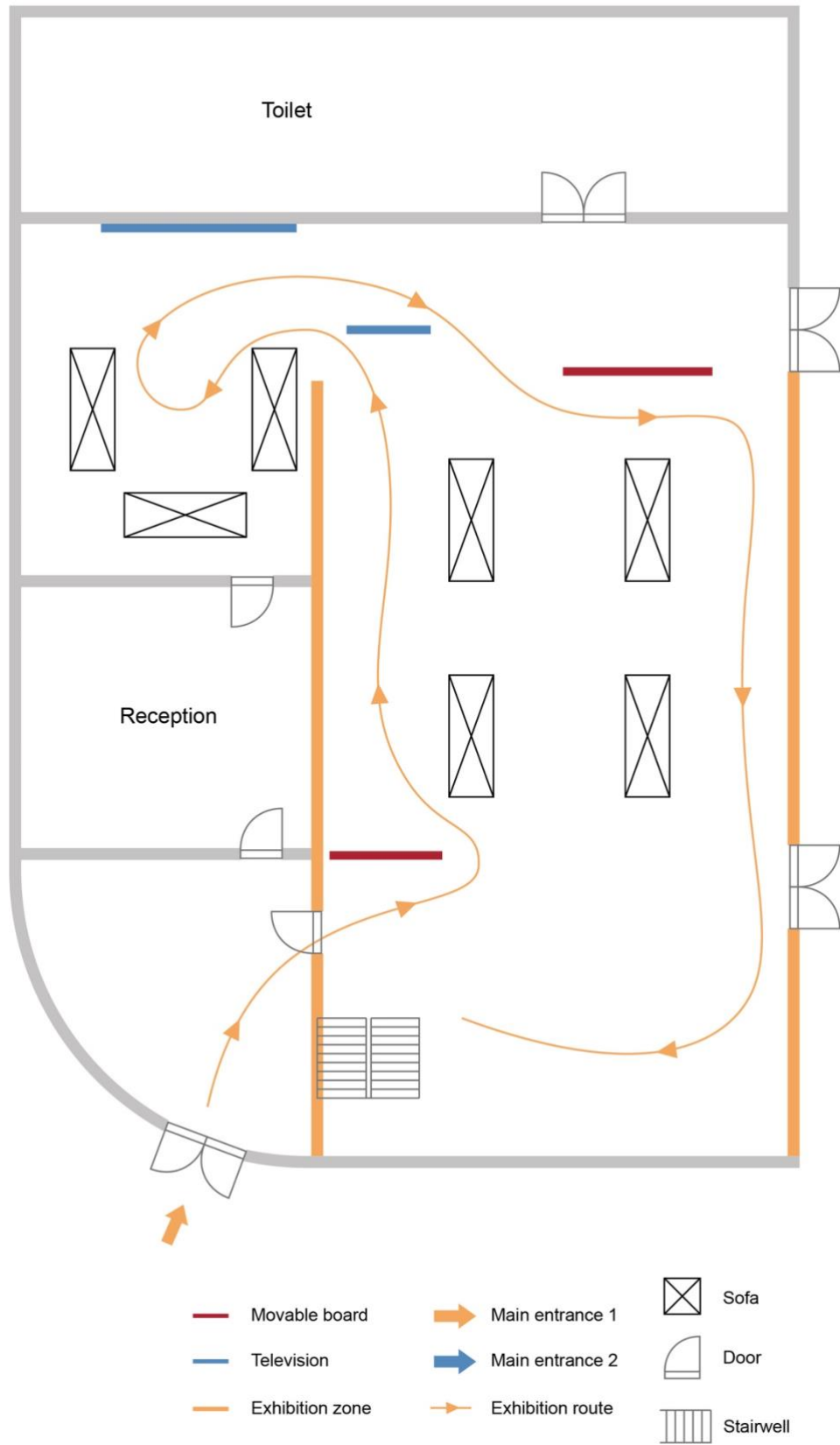


Figure 19 Visitors' exploration of the exhibition in the Meteor Theatre.

3. The exhibition in the public space at School of Design

The exhibition at the School of Design (SOD), University of Waikato, was held from 1 May to 15 May 2024. The exhibition poster (see the left side of Figure 20) provides key details, including the title, dates, and location. The content of the exhibition was identical to that of the Meteor Theatre display. The exhibition was installed in the public space at SOD. The primary audience for this exhibition consisted of staff and students from the Design and Media Department at the University of Waikato. The right side of Figure 20 illustrates the exhibition space, highlighting the layout and display arrangement. Figure 21 presents the visitor route within the exhibition area.



Figure 20 The poster and the exhibition space at SOD.

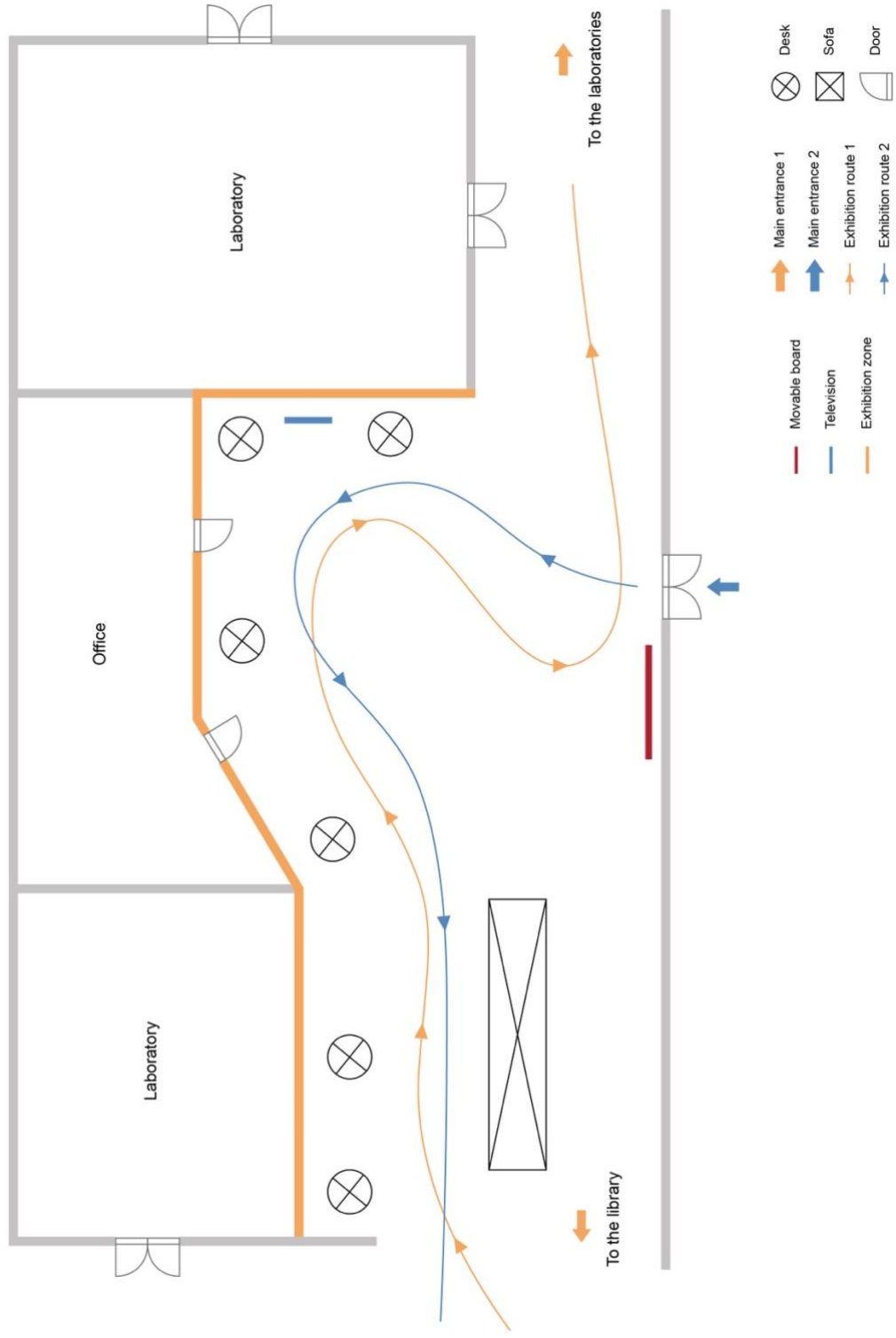


Figure 21 The visiting route of the exhibition in the public space at SOD.

4.3 Data Analysis Methods and Process

This study employed a multi-method qualitative analysis strategy, integrating IPA, RTA and DSA to accommodate the diversity in both content and structure of the collected datasets.

Specifically, IPA was applied to analyse semi-structured interviews with six artists with visual impairment who participated in the collaborative art practices. This method enabled an in-depth exploration of how each artist made sense of their sensory experiences and creative practices, emphasising individualised meaning-making and the phenomenological understanding of lived experience (Smith, 2009). DSA was primarily employed to systematically organise, summarise, and present the quantitative data collected from questionnaires across the four exhibitions. This approach enabled the researcher to understand the basic characteristics and distributions of audiences within the two cultural contexts (Kaur et al., 2018). Concurrently, RTA was employed to analyse two additional types of data below. This approach emphasises the active role of the researcher in theme development, allowing for nuanced, flexible engagement with meaning-making across datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

(1) open-ended responses from audience questionnaires collected during exhibitions held in China (n=97) and New Zealand (n=55); and

(2) the researcher's own reflexive journals and field notes, which captured multi-perspective engagement and self-reflection across the researcher's multiple roles as a researcher, curator, and art practitioner.

This chapter outlines how these three analytical methods were applied to the respective datasets, providing a detailed account of the data analysis process and the theoretical frameworks underpinning the research.

4.3.1 Interview Data Analysis Method

A. IPA and Case-level Analysis. IPA was employed to analyse interviews exploring how artists engage in sensory and creative practices within the sociocultural context of disability in China. As a qualitative method focused on the interpretation of lived experience, IPA emphasises how individuals make sense of their bodily, perceptual, and social worlds (Smith & Nizza, 2022). This method aligns with the study's aim to investigate the intersection between embodied difference and artistic expression. While IPA draws on the principle of epoché (as mentioned in Section 3.2.1), the method recognises that the ideal of fully suspending all presuppositions is rarely attainable in practice (Thomas & Sohn, 2023). Instead, IPA operationalises a form of reflexive bracketing, whereby the researcher actively identifies, examines, and manages, rather than entirely eliminates, preconceptions to remain open to participants' accounts (Smith, 2009). In this study, bracketing took the form of sustained self-reflection on the researcher's positionality as a sighted collaborator, ensuring that interpretations were continually anchored in the artists' lived sensory experiences.

The interviews were designed to elicit detailed reflections on non-visual artistic engagement, encompassing perceptual processes, bodily involvement, imagination, and the collaborative dynamics of art-making. Participants also discussed their understanding of disability and its relation to the creative practices. Transcribed interviews were analysed through multiple coding cycles following IPA procedures, with attention to both descriptive and conceptual themes (see Section B: Coding process).

Through IPA, the research assumes an interconnection between individuals' understanding, thoughts, and affective states (Eatough & Smith, 2017). This approach facilitated an in-depth investigation of how artists with visual impairment engaged in reflexive and interpretative practices during their creative processes. The second research question informed the analytical focus on how perceptions and embodied difference are expressed and negotiated within artistic practices. The analysis focused on the use of non-visual sensory modalities in meaning, with particular attention to how these modalities may challenge conventional assumptions about perception and creativity. The interpretative process was iterative and dynamic, shaped by ongoing interaction and co-reflection with the artists. Such continuous evolution linked participants' individual experiences to broader social and cultural contexts.

However, the researcher recognises that this chain is frequently complex, as individual personalities vary, sometimes making it challenging for participants to express their thoughts and feelings authentically. The researcher, therefore, needs to interpret the participants' emotional states from their spoken words, taking into account the specific contexts in which expressions occur (Smith, 2009). A distinctive feature of IPA is its commitment to providing a highly detailed analysis of each case, which typically results in research conducted on a small sample size to avoid overwhelming qualitative data and ensure in-depth analysis. By focusing on each participant's experience, IPA enables the researcher to uncover both commonalities and differences when understanding everyone's unique experience (MacLeod, 2019). In this study, such analysis is expressed through thematically structured narratives that incorporate direct quotations from the artists' interviews,

integrated with interpretative commentary. These results are presented in Chapter 5, where individual experiences are situated within broader cultural, sensory, and philosophical contexts.

In the non-visual photography project, IPA focused on how artists developed photographic practices without visual input, the role of non-visual senses in shaping their creative decisions, and their reflections on both their artworks and experiences of disability. In the improvisational music and dance projects, IPA was used to explore how artists interacted with others and their environments through sound, rhythm, and bodily sensation, revealing patterns of sensory awareness and relational creativity. For the installation art project, IPA examined how tactile exploration and spatial perception informed the creation of interactive and multi-material works, highlighting how artists constructed meaning through embodied engagement with space and materials.

Across all projects, the IPA process followed iterative cycles of close reading, initial noting, emergent theme development, and cross-case analysis, allowing the researcher to trace both shared and divergent meaning-making processes among participants.

B. Coding Process and Thematic Development. IPA was used to analyse the interview data from six artists with visual impairment. Following Smith (2009), the analysis involved multiple rounds of coding to identify patterns and develop thematic insights into the artists' lived creative experiences.

In the initial coding phase, descriptive themes were developed to capture key aspects of how sensory interactions and embodied experiences emerged during the creation process of the collaborative artworks. The researcher examined the surface-level content of the interviews, capturing how the artists described their experiences across different forms of non-visual artistic

engagement. This step identified specific experiences and actions undertaken by the artists during the creative processes.

In the second round of analysis, the researcher sought to uncover conceptual themes, moving beyond surface descriptions to explore deeper meanings embedded in the artists' narratives. Specifically, this stage focused on identifying how creative processes were conceptualised, how disability was thematically represented, and how lived experience was situated in relation to broader cultural contexts. Following the establishment of conceptual themes, the third round concentrated on cross-case thematic development. In this stage, the researcher examined similarities and differences among the six artists with visual impairment, synthesising themes that emerged both within individual projects and across different collaborative practices. Analysis shifted to broader patterns, including the use of non-visual sensory modalities across different artistic forms as well as themes relating to disability and social perception that emerged within the participants' accounts.

After identifying major themes, the researcher engaged in a cyclical process of reflection, revisiting the data to refine and clarify these themes. For instance, the in-vivo code "create it step by step (Mr. Wang)" was first relabelled as a descriptive code "inclusivity in collaboration", then grouped with similar statements under the category "collaborations/power relations", which was subsequently integrated into the broader theme "the integration of art forms in creative practice". This refinement process also included merging overlapping codes and separating overly broad ones, including categories, themes, and corresponding essences and descriptions. This iterative procedure involved consistently referring to the original data to ensure the themes accurately represented the artists' experiences, while simultaneously identifying and examining potential contradictions or overlaps. This

reflexive approach ensured that the interpretations remained firmly grounded in the artists' lived and creative experiences, enabling multiple layers of meaning to emerge.

4.3.2 Analysis Method of Audience Feedback and Researcher Reflection

A. Audience Feedback Analysis through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). To explore embodied perceptions and emotional responses to the artworks created by the artists with visual impairment, the researcher collected audience feedback through questionnaires administered across four exhibitions held in China and New Zealand. A mixed-methods approach was adopted for the analysis, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. This combination enabled an in-depth examination of participants' subjective experiences and evaluative criteria in relation to the exhibitions.

Moreover, the researcher produced a series of reflexive journals and field notes throughout the research process. These first-person texts were also analysed using RTA. The content of these writings illuminated the researcher's shifting positionalities and role transitions, namely as a researcher, curator, and artistic practitioner. The multi-perspectival engagement and continuous self-reflection captured in these texts provided a critical lens for understanding the subjective dimensions of the research process and the mechanisms of knowledge production therein.

Regarding the DSA, the quantitative data collected through the questionnaires were systematically organised and interpreted. Statistical indicators such as percentage distributions and mean values were used to illustrate the demographic composition of the audience, particularly in terms of age and nationality. These indicators were employed to examine the usage of accessibility services and to evaluate audience responses to the multisensory experiences provided by the

exhibitions. The structured presentation of empirical data offered a robust foundation for subsequent qualitative thematic analysis and enhanced the credibility and explanatory power of the study's overall findings.

To complement the quantitative analysis, RTA was used to investigate qualitative data from audience feedback and the researcher's reflexive journals. RTA, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021), emphasises the context-specific construction of meaning, encouraging openness to unexpected themes, the inclusion of diverse perspectives, and attention to the performative role of language in meaning-making. This method is particularly well-suited for exploring complex subjective experiences and cultural understandings, aligning with the present study's aim to analyse both audience responses to accessibility services, audio descriptions, and multi-sensory installations, and the researcher's multi-role engagement throughout the research process.

Framed by RTA, the analysis focused on exploring how audiences engaged with accessibility services, audio descriptions, and multisensory installations, and how these experiences contributed to cultural and perceptual shifts regarding disability art. The findings of this analysis, including thematic structures and audience interpretations, are presented and discussed in Chapter 6.

B. Researcher Reflexivity and Positional Transformation. RTA was employed to critically examine the evolving role of the researcher within the collaborative process and the reflections from the exhibitions. As Braun and Clarke (2019) suggest, RTA may function both as a compass and a map for researchers, guiding the exploration of the unknown and the co-construction of meaning in practice.

Rather than being developed in isolation, the researcher's reflections in this study were shaped through collaborative interactions with artists with visual impairment and conversations with audiences during the exhibitions. These interactions prompted the researcher to continuously negotiate their positionality and role within the project. Reflexive journals and field notes documented the researcher's embodied and affective responses, including embodied perceptions, affective fluctuations, and physical presence within the collaborative settings. These reflections focused on the shifting dynamics between the roles of researcher, curator, and practitioner. Rather than being treated as a separate dataset, the researcher's embodied insights were integrated directly into the IPA analysis of participants' narratives. By situating the researcher's sensory and affective experiences alongside those of the artists, this approach contributed an embedded subjective dimension that reinforced the relational and processual nature of the research.

In summary, to analyse the diverse data sources in this study, a multi-method approach was employed, combining IPA, RTA, and DSA. IPA was applied to the semi-structured interviews with visually impaired artists to explore their embodied experiences and creative processes. RTA was used to analyse both open-ended audience feedback and the researcher's reflexive journals, allowing for the identification of patterns in subjective interpretation, cultural framing, and role negotiation. DSA supported the analysis of quantitative questionnaire data, including demographic information and responses to accessibility features. This integrated strategy ensured that each dataset was analysed using a method appropriate to its structure and content, enabling a comprehensive and layered interpretation across participant, audience, and researcher perspectives.

Chapter 5: Findings – Collaborative Arts Practice and Sensory Experiences

5.1 Overview

This chapter presents a critical analysis of the creative experiences of artists with visual impairment participating in four collaborative art projects, including non-visual photography, improvisational music, improvisational dance, and installation art, carried out between July 2022 and February 2023. Drawing on three interrelated data sources, semi-structured interviews with artists, documentation of artistic processes, and the researcher's reflexive journals, the chapter explores how visual impairment shaped the artists' sensory engagement, artistic identity, and creative strategies. The analytical process integrated IPA and RTA, aligning with the transdisciplinary methodological framework outlined in Chapter 4.

Rather than treating each analytical method in isolation, the researcher adopted a layered interpretative approach that moved iteratively between embodied accounts, observational field notes, and reflexive interpretation. The reflexive component, central to RQ 3, foregrounded the participant-researcher's own position as collaborator, co-developer, and curator, critically engaging with how these roles interacted with and were shaped by the artists' perspectives. This reflective strand runs through the analysis of both the co-creative process and subsequent audience engagement. The triangulated process enabled a multifaceted examination of artistic experience, grounded in the material practices, spatial interactions, and sensory expressions emerging from each collaborative project.

To provide a clearer presentation of the analysis, the discussion of each theme draws on data triangulated from the four short documentaries corresponding to the collaborative projects (non-visual photography, improvisational music, improvisational dance, and installation art) and from semi-structured interviews with the participating artists. The interview sources collectively informed the thematic interpretations that follow, with each theme serving as an analytical lens through which the collaborative processes, sensory engagements, and artistic strategies of the participating artists are examined.

The chapter's four sections, reconfiguring sensory experience (5.2), integration of art forms (5.3), critical rethinking of art and disability (5.4), and shaping audience understanding (5.5), reflect this methodological interplay. Analytical attention was given to how artists with visual impairment engaged with the environment through tactile, auditory, and affective modalities, generating meaning through embodied movement, spatial negotiation, and sensory responsiveness. Concepts such as embodied perception, environmental affordance, and place-making were employed to interpret how artistic actions unfolded through dynamic interactions between the sensing body and its surroundings, in line with phenomenological perspectives on perception and experience. This chapter addresses the following research questions:

- RQ 1: How does the perceptual, social, and cultural construction of creative practice of the artists with visual impairment challenge prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art, and vision impairment in China and New Zealand?
- RQ 2: How do artists with visual impairment navigate and challenge visual-centric creative traditions?

- RQ 3: How can the dual perspectives of the participant-researcher, as collaborator, co-developer, and curator, and the artists with visual impairment be integrated into creative practice as research?

The analysis began with open coding of interview transcripts and field observations, identifying key experiential markers across the four art practices. Early codes included terms such as scan and navigate by touch, muscle memory, body map, and visceral feelings, reflecting the artists' reliance on non-visual perception and their reinterpretation of dominant visual-centric norms in art and disability discourse. These were subsequently synthesised into broader thematic categories that illuminated the artists' internal perceptual patterns, aesthetic logics, and experiential understandings. Each theme offers insight into how sensory-based creative practices not only support artistic production but also contribute to shifting public perceptions of creativity, inclusion, and the cultural value of disability. The themes also examine the strategies used by the artists to challenge visual-centric assumptions about creativity, artistic value, and disability. The findings reflect a wider set of concerns related to inclusive artistic practice and disability aesthetics, positioning these co-creative engagements within broader sociocultural and artistic contexts.

Figure 22 presents a visual overview of the coding structure and emerging themes. A more detailed interpretation of each theme is presented in the subsequent sections of this chapter, while a comprehensive methodological discussion of the analytical procedures is provided in Chapter 4.

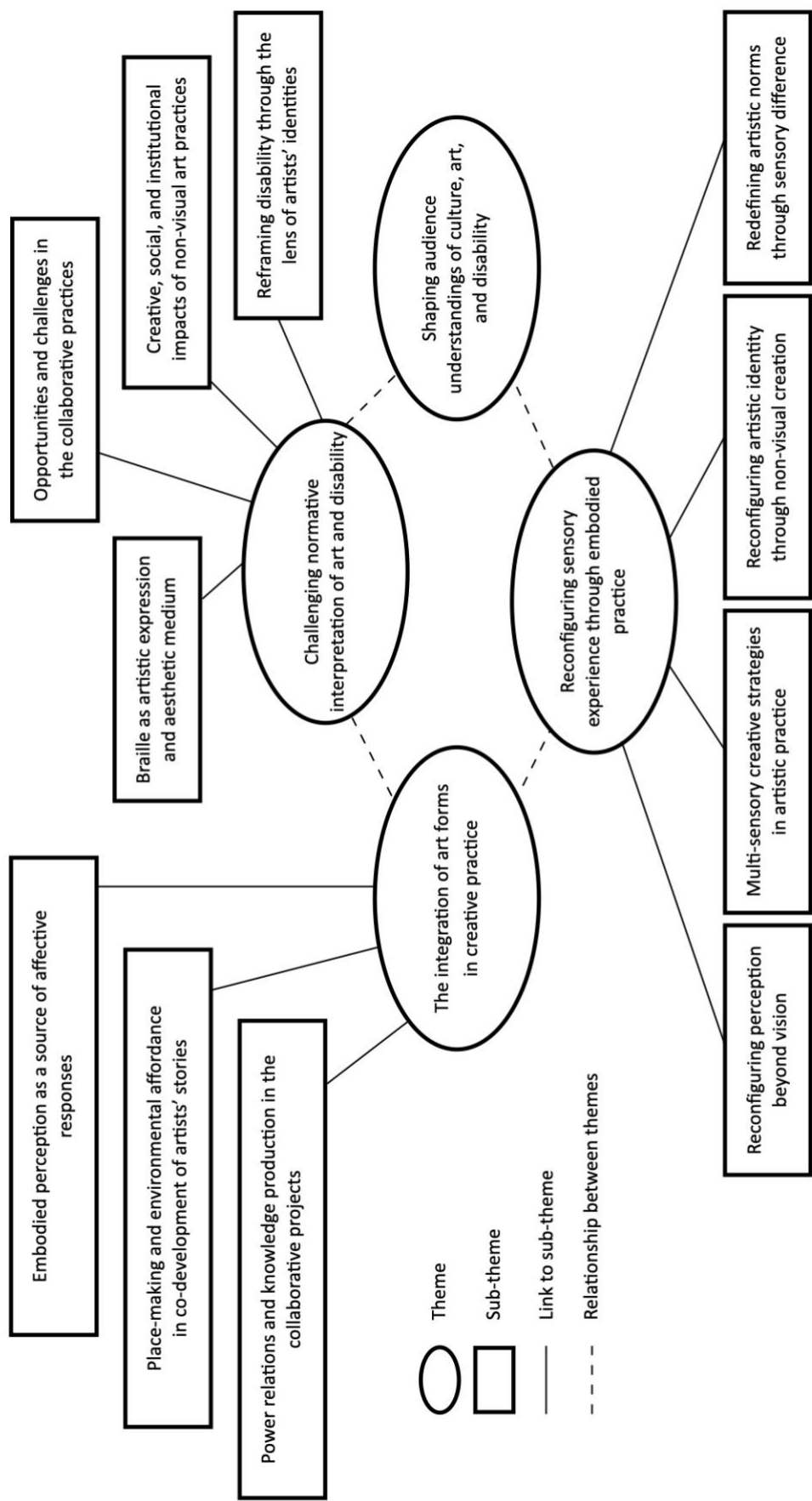


Figure 22 Thematic map derived from interview data with visually impaired artists.

The chapter is organised around four core themes, each encompassing several sub-themes. These themes are not treated as discrete categories but, rather, as interwoven lenses through which the dynamics of artistic creation, disability experience, and collaborative practice are critically examined:

- Reconfiguring sensory experience through embodied practice: Explores how artists with visual impairment developed alternative perceptual strategies, reshaped the sensory worlds, and challenged visual-centric assumptions through embodied artistic engagement.

Sub-themes:

- Reconfiguring perception beyond vision
 - Multisensory creative strategies in artistic practice
 - Reconfiguring artistic identity through non-visual creation
 - Redefining artistic norms through sensory difference
- The integration of art forms in creative practice: Examines how transdisciplinary artistic practices, spanning photography, music, dance, and installation, enabled cross-sensory expression, affective resonance, and environmental affordance, challenging normative divisions between artistic disciplines and sensory modalities.

Sub-themes:

- Embodied perception as a source of affective responses
- Place-making and environmental affordance in co-development of artists' stories
- Power relations and knowledge production in the collaborative projects

- Challenging normative interpretations of art and disability: Interrogates how collaborative practices reframe conventional notions of artistic capacity, institutional value, and disability identity by foregrounding agency, innovation, and resistance to aesthetic ableism.

Sub-themes:

- Opportunities and challenges in the collaborative practices
 - Creative, social, and institutional impacts of non-visual art practices
 - Reframing disability through the lens of artists' identities
 - Braille as artistic expression and aesthetic medium
- Shaping audience understandings of culture, art, and disability: Analyses how multisensory exhibitions influenced public perception by facilitating embodied, affective, and cross-cultural engagements with disability arts.

Across the analysis of these themes, the chapter demonstrates how sensory difference not only influenced creative process but also generated critical insight into the cultural construction of disability, the aesthetics of access, and the political dimensions of sensory experience. The discussion highlights their intersections; for example, how tactile perception informs both artistic authorship and curatorial infrastructure, or how affective memory shapes place-making and identity formation. The findings show that disability art, when approached through embodied and collaborative modalities, redefines the very terms through which creativity, knowledge, and inclusion are understood.

5.2 Sensory Reconfiguration Through Embodied Practice

Analysis of the interview, including interview questions (see Appendix D) and supporting video documentation (Ma, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2022a), co-creative processes, and field observations, revealed that artists with visual impairment employed a wide range of non-visual sensory strategies to support artistic expression and engagement. These strategies were not compensatory, but generative, shaping the choice of creative media and challenging normative associations between particular senses and established art forms. For instance, photography was no longer dependent on vision alone, and dance emerged as a holistic engagement with space, rhythm, and touch. Through tactile interaction, auditory awareness, and bodily movement, the artists challenged dominant aesthetic paradigms and redefined sensory hierarchies embedded in conventional art forms.

While the participating artists experienced diverse forms of visual impairment, all actively foregrounded non-visual modalities as central to artistic practice. Embodied sensory experience, notably touch, hearing, spatial awareness, and internal sensation, served both practical and expressive purposes. Artists drew upon residual visual memory, proprioception, and imagination to construct multisensory approaches that infused their work with subjectivity and emotional resonance.

This section explores how adaptation to visual impairment unfolded through embodied experience, focusing on three interconnected aspects: (1) embodied reconfiguration of perception beyond vision, (2) multisensory strategies in artistic practice, and (3) artistic identity transformation, which mutually reinforce each other to reveal how embodied experience unfolds within creative practice. The findings demonstrate that visual impairment did not limit expression but instead opened new perceptual and artistic possibilities grounded in embodied agency and cultural meaning.

5.2.1 Restructuring Perceptual Frameworks Through Non-visual Sensing

This section examines how artists with visual impairment reconfigure embodied perception in ways that challenge visual-centric assumptions. Rather than adapting passively to a loss of vision, the participants in this study demonstrated diverse processes of sensory reconfiguration, memory integration, and perceptual reorientation. The findings emerged through a reflexive interpretative analysis combining interview dialogue, field notes, and collaborative art-making observations. Within this framework, adaptation is not understood as a compensatory adjustment but as a situated, creative reorganisation of sensory experience that resists ocularnormative expectations. These insights did not emerge solely through data extraction but were co-developed through dialogic engagement, collaborative artistic practice, and reflexive interpretation, reflecting a shared process of meaning-making between the researcher and the participating artists.

In this research, the six artists had diverse experiences of visual impairment encompassing a wide range of sensory configurations, shaped by personal histories of illness, trauma, or degenerative conditions. While the degree of residual visual perception varied, artistic engagement was consistently grounded in alternative sensory pathways. Interviews and collaborative observations revealed that the artists reorganised the perceptual strategies by cultivating attentiveness to auditory cues, tactile textures, and spatial rhythms. These findings align with previous research on sensory reorganisation following vision loss, which highlights the body's capacity to develop new perceptual practices through experience, affect, and environmental feedback (Shelton & Ruiz, 2024; Silva et al., 2018; Ueda, 2018). Rather than compensating for an absent sense, these reconfigurations served as the foundation of

creative method, affirming the primacy of multisensory engagement in artistic expression (Fritsche et al., 2022; Lunghi et al., 2019).

Mr. Jiang, the non-visual photographer in this study who lost vision in childhood (as mentioned in Section 4.2.1), referred to his working method as an “*extension of perception*” (personal communication, September 30, 2022), a process of mapping space through auditory echoes and tactile interaction. Despite no longer relying on vision, spatial awareness was co-constructed through a dynamic interplay between environmental feedback and bodily orientation. Similarly, Mr. Kong, the musician who lost vision at age 12 (as mentioned in Section 4.2.1), described in the interview how a mental 3D map of space is assembled through movement and hearing:

Although the colours on my mental map might be off ... my brain might colour it automatically.

It might still be green in my mind during autumn when the leaves have turned yellow. But I would know the direction of each object. (personal communication, October 22, 2022)²

These descriptions demonstrate that spatial knowledge and aesthetic engagement are not necessarily dependent on visual input. Instead, creative practice emerges from a complex layering of embodied memory, auditory cues, and touch-based navigation, offering alternative perceptual grammars that resist visual dominance.

² All original quotations from the artists were translated by the researcher and are presented in italics.

Mr. Wang, the installation artist with visual impairment (refer to Section 4.2.1), retained a minimal degree of visual perception. The ability to detect faint light and outlines significantly influenced how spatial relationships were perceived and translated into creative decisions. For instance, when selecting sensory-based materials, he frequently preferred those that interacted with refracted light (Ma, 2022a, 01:15–01:21), which he found particularly compelling (see Figure 23). This preference was not directed towards restoring visual aesthetics but, rather, reflected a nuanced interaction between residual vision, material response, and embodied sensing. Mr. Wang's work exemplifies how partial visual perception, rather than dominating the creative process, operates as one modality within a broader multisensory framework. This hybrid perceptual approach reflects an intentional departure from vision-centric norms in artistic practice. His case highlights how artists with visual impairment do not passively accept remaining vision as a limitation or focal point but actively negotiate its meaning through artistic practice.



Figure 23 Mr. Wang arranges laser paper in his installation artwork using residual vision and touch.

Moreover, differences in how people engaged with their environments reflected the wide range of perceptual orientations shaped by visual impairment. Mr. Kong, for example, reflected on the experience of some peers who were blind from birth. He observed: *“When asked to describe visual concepts, such as the colour red, the people who were born blind found it difficult to comprehend due to the absence of visual experience”* (personal communication, October 22, 2022).

Mr. Kong emphasised that this was not a limitation but an indication that such concepts simply did not hold the same perceptual relevance. Instead, he noted, the people who were born blind developed refined auditory sensitivity and embodied environmental awareness, which enriched the creative approaches.

However, the process of sensory reconfiguration, through which perception was reorganised across non-visual modalities, was gradual, requiring consistent practice and adjustment. In 2021, the

researcher participated in an experiential activity called *Dark Running* in Nanjing, China, in which participants ran in complete darkness with their eyes covered, guided by staff members using a rope. This simulation of sudden blindness resulted in an immediate loss of spatial orientation. In that moment, the habitual mode of receiving external information shifted from vision to auditory and tactile channels.

By contrast, individuals with long-term blindness typically develop habitual sensory processing strategies that rely primarily on hearing and touch. Mr. Kong emphasised this distinction during the interview, highlighting the differing cognitive and perceptual adjustments required in cases of sudden versus long-term visual impairment. Mr. Kong stated:

If you compare someone who suddenly goes blind to someone who's been blind for a long time, the latter will have a deeper understanding because they are accustomed to it. I'm used to acquiring information through hearing, stimulating thinking and activity in the brain. But if you suddenly switch from auditory to visual, you will need a lot of practice to possibly reach an average reading speed. (personal communication, October 22, 2022)

A comparison between long-term and sudden blindness revealed differing levels of adaptation and associated challenges. Mr. Kong further remarked:

Such comparisons are unfair, as they tend to exaggerate the difficulties experienced by people with visual impairment. Sighted individuals might assume that even basic tasks, such as putting on trousers, become overwhelmingly difficult. However, in reality, once adaptation occurs, these tasks are manageable. It is not entirely easy, but it becomes a routine process over time. (personal communication, October 22, 2022)

Mr. Su, a dancer with visual impairment (as mentioned in Section 4.2.1), echoed this view: *“For me now, I don't think my vision has much impact on my own work”* (personal communication, July 11, 2022).

These reflections emphasise the importance of time, repetition, and experiential learning in cultivating new modes of engagement. Embodied adjustment to a visually oriented world does not imply sensory substitution or compensation, but, rather, involves a fundamental reconfiguration of perceptual hierarchies, spatial orientation, and creative intentionality. This reconfiguration unfolds through iterative, situated practices shaped by the lived conditions of visual impairment. These findings directly address the first research question by demonstrating how artists with visual impairment reorganise perception through embodied strategies that exceed compensatory models and challenge visual-centric assumptions.

5.2.2 Generative Multi-sensory Approaches in Disability Art Practice

Building upon the perceptual reconfiguration discussed in Section 5.2.1, this subsection explores the concrete sensory strategies that emerged within artistic practice, particularly auditory, tactile, and spatial perception, to engage with the world and develop unique artistic expressions. The findings presented here were developed through a layered analytical process that emerged from the collaborative practices and semi-structured interviews conducted with the artists. This process combined IPA with the researcher's reflexive journaling and embodied engagement throughout the projects. The analytical process unfolded iteratively alongside the co-creative practices, where sensory interactions and shared reflection shaped both the data and its interpretation. The material discussed in this section forms part of a broader theme identified during analysis: the reconfiguration of non-

visual perception. This theme was further interpreted through a transdisciplinary framework that integrates phenomenology, Daoist philosophy, and CDS, allowing for a cross-cultural understanding of perception, embodiment, and creative practice.

A. Auditory and Tactile Reconfiguration. For the artists with visual impairment, hearing constitutes a primary modality of orientation, interaction, and creative engagement, reflecting a reconfiguration of sensory priorities rather than a compensatory mechanism. Mr. Jiang described how he relied on the interplay of hearing and touch to approximate spatial relationships and interpret environmental cues, thereby constructing a richly situated sensory narrative (personal communication, September 30, 2022). Similarly, Mr. Kong explained in the interview: *“Hearing is a survival instinct for me ... hearing helps me monitor everything around me all the time”* (personal communication, October 22, 2022).

This statement highlighted the central role of hearing in his daily life, where it served as a crucial sensory mechanism for accessing environmental information and maintaining physical balance. Mr. Kong elaborated further: *“There's sound as a reference. For instance, I can visualise a building based on its sound, be it a wall or any other structure. If there are loud noises nearby, you might not hear distant sounds”* (personal communication, October 22, 2022).

He described how the brain automatically activates a *“tracking function”* that follows the movement and direction of sound sources, enabling real-time spatial awareness and responsive interaction. Unlike vision, which delineates edges and corners with clarity, auditory perception operates through shifting gradients of sound, requiring constant harmonisation rather than fixed spatial mapping. Such practices reflect not sensory compensation but a reconfiguration of perceptual

priorities, where auditory input functions as a reliable and embodied modality for navigating and shaping experience.

In contrast, the researcher, whose training in visual design had cultivated a reliance on visual modes of perception, observed that auditory engagement in daily experience remained relatively underdeveloped. This contrast made the normative assumptions embedded in visual-centric artistic training visible. Mr. Kong's remark that *"hearing helps me visualise space"* drew attention to the ways in which artists with visual impairment construct mental spatial maps through distributed sensory inputs, rather than compensating for a lack of sight.

In creative contexts, auditory perception became a structuring principle. In the non-visual photography project, Mr. Jiang used sound to discern spatial relationships and object positions, developing a composition technique grounded in auditory perception. He explained: *"If you hold the device too low, your shot might be off or not capture what you intended. This is where hearing comes into play ... when I interacted with you, first I heard your position ..."* (personal communication, September 30, 2022).

He positioned the camera at head level and listened attentively to surrounding cues, enabling precise subject framing through sound rather than sight. Similarly, in the improvisational dance project, Mr. Su used auditory feedback to navigate space and engage with dance partners, facilitating smooth and responsive movement. Mr. Su emphasised in the interview that his improvisation was frequently initiated by sound, as auditory input inspired shifts in thought and spontaneous creative responses. He noted: *"Improvisation comes from your site, like I heard that you are over there, do some actions ..."*

This might give me a message at that moment, prompting an immediate bodily response or feedback on my part” (personal communication, July 11, 2022).

Here, auditory stimuli acted not only as spatial indicators but also as creative triggers, shaping improvised gestures and spontaneous responses. The researcher’s presence within the spatial environment also influenced the unfolding of these interactions, as the positioning of the body and voice became cues within the shared sensory field (see Figure 24). This responsive process reflects the Daoist principle of *wu-wei* (as mentioned in Section 3.2.1). Rather than imposing fixed forms, the artist responds fluidly to the unfolding environment through embodied awareness.



Figure 24 Mr. Su responding to the researcher’s spatial positioning and voice during the improvisational dance session.

This layered engagement with sensory modalities was further complicated and enriched when artists collaborated across different types of perceptual difference. During the filming process, the researcher and Mr. Jiang collaboratively documented several compelling scenes. Among the most

striking was the interaction between Mr. Jiang, the non-visual photographer, and a straw-weaving pattern designer with hearing impairment who worked at the Sunshine Workshop (Ma, 2022b, 03:24–04:40). This exchange posed inherent challenges, as Mr. Jiang relied on auditory communication, while the designer primarily used visual modes, such as typing on a phone or writing on paper. Because of this sensory mismatch, direct communication was difficult and required third-party mediation. In this context, the researcher served as an intermediary, facilitating the flow of information between the two. This multisensory interaction was filmed from a third-person perspective (see Figure 25), illustrating not only the complexity of the encounter but also how differing perceptual modalities were negotiated and integrated within the collaborative process.



Figure 25 The researcher (centre) acted as an intermediary in the communication between the pattern designer with hearing-impairment (left) and the photographer with visual impairment (right).

Likewise, Mr. Wang referenced his *Dark Kitchen* installation art project in the interview. He described how he used layered kitchen sounds, such as boiling water, chopping rhythms, and ambient

utensil clatter, to create a spatialised audio landscape that guided audiences and evoked an immersive, multisensory experience. Collectively, these artistic practices demonstrated not only the potential of auditory perception in non-visual art creation but also challenged conventional boundaries of artistic expression. By emphasising multisensory engagement, the artists with visual impairment offered audiences alternative ways of experiencing art, perspectives rooted in perception, imagination, and interaction, rather than visuality alone.

Beyond sound, tactile perception played a similarly active role in spatial orientation and art-making. Mr. Kong remarked: *“Touch can sometimes be very detailed”* (personal communication, October 22, 2022). He contrasted the slower, cyclical nature of tactile exploration with the rapid scanning enabled by vision. Yet through repeated contact, touch yielded nuanced understanding. He described this tactile mapping process as iterative and exploratory, particularly when navigating physical spaces or identifying unfamiliar objects.

For instance, when entering a new room, he would use both his hands and white cane to trace walls, door frames, or surrounding furniture multiple times. This deliberate process enabled him to gradually construct a detailed mental map, allowing for the detection of subtle spatial cues, such as variations in texture, distance, or object alignment, that might otherwise be missed by a single touch or visual glance. He stated: *“I can intuitively know where I am, possibly even faster than someone with normal vision”* (personal communication, October 22, 2022). Such accounts revealed how tactile, auditory, and proprioceptive information were integrated to produce a three-dimensional spatial understanding, aligning with Ungar’s (2018) notion of sensory fusion in non-visual navigation.

The importance of touch was also evident in the photography process. Mr. Jiang used touch to determine the position and texture of objects before taking a photo. He would frequently raise the camera to his forehead or eye level, allowing tactile input to guide framing and focus. Figure 26 shows a close-up image taken by Mr. Jiang after tactually adjusting the camera position, capturing both the texture of the material and the surrounding indoor environment. Contrary to the idea that touch “compensated” for sight, this process represented an embodied dialogue between the body and the environment, wherein touch mediated the act of seeing differently.

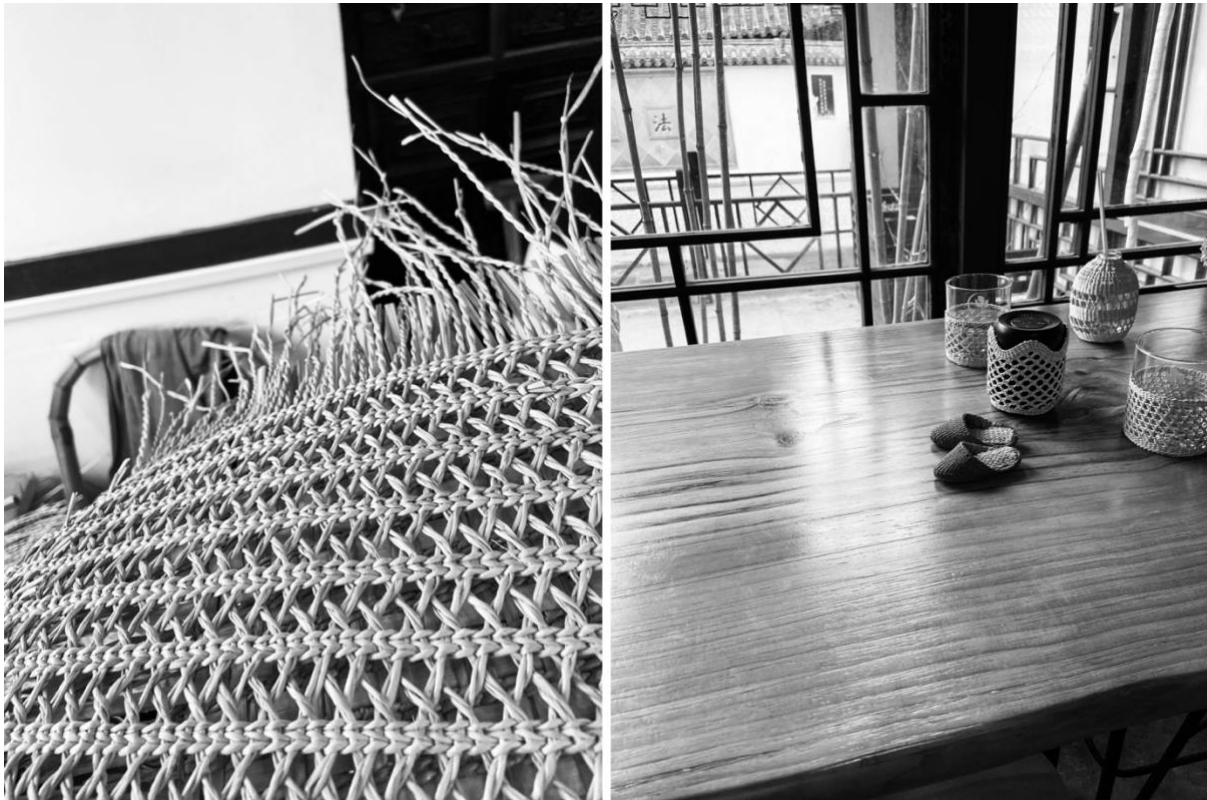


Figure 26 Photographs taken by Mr. Jiang after tactually adjusting the camera position.

This tactile engagement was not merely functional but deeply cognitive. Mr. Kong described how the act of touching an object could activate a process of rational and logical analysis. Through tactile interaction, sensory information was not only gathered but mentally organised and interpreted,

extending perception beyond the surface level. As he explained: *“When you touch something, it might awaken a rational and logical analysis for me”* (personal communication, October 22, 2022).

Such practices illustrate that tactile exploration was not a passive substitute for vision but an active modality of inquiry and meaning-making, aligning with the concept of distributed affordances in embodied cognition. In this way, tactile inquiry also resonates with Daoist epistemology, which privileges intuitive reasoning and relational awareness grounded in lived bodily experience.

The significance of these sensory processes lies not only in practical orientation but also in the artists’ aesthetic engagement with the world. The heightened auditory and tactile sensitivities informed distinctive modes of creation, rooted in harmonisation, memory, and spatial imagination. These findings foreground a redefinition of perception as relational and multimodal, challenging ocular-centric hierarchies. This shift not only decentralises vision but critiques the normative hierarchy of the senses embedded in dominant aesthetic and cultural paradigms, as discussed in CDS. By centring embodied, non-visual practices, artists with visual impairment challenge the normative hierarchy of the senses. The creative processes of the artists align with Daoist principles of situational responsiveness and sensory harmony, underscoring the generative potential of alternative perceptual modalities in disability arts practice.

B. Olfactory Memory and Multisensory Imagery. Olfactory perception, though less frequently discussed by the artists with visual impairment in their everyday practices, emerged as a potent trigger for memory and affective resonance. Smell often evoked recollections and affective responses that were distinct from those elicited by touch or hearing. For example, Mr. Kong described:

Like, I am in a certain-sized house, what's the lighting like in that house, the layout, and it is not just going back to that environment, it takes you back to the sensory experience at that time. It is like your childhood, how you perceived the world. It feels like the whole world is floating, like in a dreamy bubble from a cartoon or TV show, the feeling of crossing over. Your whole perception changes. I feel like this is something that hearing, and touch or other senses cannot evoke. It is like a hyperlink. (personal communication, October 22, 2022)

His description highlighted how olfactory stimuli could reconstruct not only a memory but also the totality of a past perceptual experience, including emotional tone and bodily orientation. For Mr. Kong, these olfactory triggers generated vivid recollections of childhood, suggesting that smell holds unique potential for shaping non-visual imagination. Mr. Jiang similarly noted the evocative capacity of smell in guiding creative impulses: *“If we smell something pleasant, we might associate it with flowers and decide to capture it, even if it turns out not to be flowers”* (personal communication, September 30, 2022).

Although olfactory input was not always consciously integrated into the artists’ practice, its affective intensity and mnemonic power offered a rich but underutilised sensory resource. As Mr. Kong explained:

Incorporating the sense of smell into artistic creation is quite challenging for me. Although I might be slightly more sensitive to smell than the average person, truly capturing and expressing it through art requires a particular kind of sensory attunement. If I had to create something based solely on olfactory input that would be very difficult. It’s a different kind of

experience altogether. Right now, I'm simply taking the initiative to explore and better understand these sensory dimensions. (personal communication, October 22, 2022)

Such remarks demonstrate the complexity and subjectivity of incorporating olfactory perception into artistic practice. Each artist's olfactory sensitivity varied, and individual scent memories often lacked a shared social reference, complicating their communicability to audiences. Nonetheless, these sensory traces held powerful affective meaning.

The potential of olfactory art has been explored by artists such as Martynka Wawrzyniak (Sleek, 2016) in *Smell Me*, a non-visual self-portrait created through extracted scent molecules. This project exemplifies how olfactory modalities can challenge visual expectations and foreground identity through embodied presence. As a primal and underutilised sensory modality, smell offered a direct and unmediated expression of identity. While the artists in this study did not engage extensively with olfaction, the accounts provided by each artist underscored the latent affective and spatial potential of scent.

Integrating olfactory elements into artistic practice presents both opportunities and challenges. While scent can enrich the sensory depth of an artwork and foster immersive engagement, its highly subjective nature complicates interpretation. Everyone possesses distinct olfactory sensitivity and scent-associated memories, making it difficult to achieve a shared or universal recognition among audiences. These personal scent experiences, often rooted in intimate memories or emotions, reflect the artist's internal world rather than conveying externally legible meanings. This subjectivity introduces complexities into multisensory communication and underscores the need for nuanced approaches when incorporating olfactory elements in creative work.

From a theoretical perspective, the Daoist notion of internal perception and intuitive resonance aligns with this multisensory engagement. Smell, as a subtle and often ineffable modality, invokes spontaneous emotional and bodily responses, resonating with the Daoist emphasis on bodily intuition and non-verbal awareness. These insights suggest that olfactory imagination, though relatively underexplored within disability arts practice, holds generative potential in non-visual creative processes. This suggests that, even when underexplored, olfactory engagement may serve as a crucial dimension in rethinking non-visual creativity and expanding the sensory aesthetics of disability arts.

C. Affective Multisensory Memory and Imagination. The heightened non-visual senses cultivated by artists with visual impairment not only enabled perceptual orientation but also enriched affective experience and creative imagination. Participants described how tactile and auditory stimuli evoked vivid internal imagery and affective associations, frequently drawing on residual visual memory. In the interview on improvisational dance project, Mr. Su remarked: *“More interacting with the environment around myself... the density of the grass and all kinds of feelings ... Then I picked them up, then fall. Let them fall automatically and felt them float ...”* (personal communication, July 11, 2022).

His description illustrated how spontaneous affective responses were shaped through direct sensory interaction with the environment, resonating with embodied memory and emotional imagination. Similarly, Mr. Wang reflected: *“The different kinds of touch also give us a feeling of temperature”* (personal communication, July 11, 2022).

In installation art, Mr. Wang engaged visual memory metaphorically. He recalled geometric forms such as circles and triangles from his residual visual experience and linked them to affective meanings, such as harmony and sharpness, respectively. These associations informed his artistic compositions and emotional design logic. This process of linking sensory memory with symbolic form resonates with a phenomenological view of imagination as an embodied, lived process.

Ms. Xiao, another non-visual photographer in this study, who lost her vision later in life, spoke of retaining a mental visual world: *“I believe that even non-visual experience still involves a kind of “visuality”; it is in the mind ... I always have colours and images in my mind ... I am probably constantly recreating colours and images in my mind”* (personal communication, October 8, 2022). She described how touch and sound not only informed spatial understanding but also stimulated imaginative transformation. When touching an oyster shell, she imagined malachite, invoking a visual analogue from past experiences: *“When I touch the smooth bottom of an oyster, I might imagine it as something like malachite, which I find visually appealing ... although it might not look that way in reality ...”* (personal communication, October 8, 2022).

As a make-up artist, Ms Xiao reflecting the image of malachite served as a bridge between her previous visual experiences and her current sensory world, allowing her to integrate memories into present encounters. In her make-up practice, Ms. Xiao translated tactile sensations into structured procedures:

I could feel colour combinations through my skin. At least I know what colour it is, and it is almost like turning my imagination into reality. Once you understand the pigmentation level,

you can establish guidelines ... not pressing harder on one side and lighter on the other ... That way, you control the colour intensity quantitatively. (personal communication, October 8, 2022)

This systematic translation of touch into visual expression demonstrates how imagination and sensory memory were integrated into creative process. Her experience highlights the generative tension between residual visual memory and emerging tactile logic.

While artists with acquired blindness frequently referenced residual visual imagery, people who were congenitally blind constructed imagery through different sensory pathways. In the absence of residual visual memories, spatial and affective qualities were interpreted primarily through auditory, tactile, and olfactory modalities (Dietz et al., 2022). These variations highlight the diversity of affective imagination among individuals with visual impairment, shaped by the onset of blindness and processes of embodied adaptation.

Through such multisensory strategies, the artists involved in this study demonstrated alternative ways of imagining, remembering, and engaging affectively with the world. The creative approaches observed were not grounded in visual reproduction but in lived sensory resonances and experiential meaning-making. These insights challenge conventional assumptions within art theory and perception studies, suggesting that memory and imagination are fundamentally relational, embodied, and multisensory phenomena. This perspective affirms a shift away from visual dominance and aligns with both the Daoist thought of embodied awareness and CDS's emphasis on sensory difference. In doing so, this section responds directly to the second research question by revealing how artists with visual impairment develop creative strategies rooted in hearing, touch, smell, and embodied imagination, which reconfigure perception and artistic expression beyond visual paradigms.

5.2.3 Constructing Artistic Identity Through Embodied Experiences

Visual impairment reshapes artistic practice by altering medium choice, creative process, and thematic focus. The findings below were refined through reflective dialogue with the participating artists during co-creative practices, ensuring that interpretation remained grounded in lived, embodied experience. Co-creative encounters revealed concrete sensory strategies while highlighting the importance of tailored support and adaptable structures that accommodate varied perceptual orientations. Such insights strengthen the methodological orientation towards collaboration and reflexive interpretation. This shift in artistic approach is not unique to the participants in this study but resonates with broader practices in non-visual art.

One of the most illustrative examples of how non-visual photography can embody lived experience was shared by Mr. Jiang during the interview (personal communication, September 30, 2022). He mentioned the work of legally blind photographer Yixuan Liang, whose widely recognised image *My Shin's Lover* (Weibo news, 2017) depicts two black-and-yellow road barriers near a pedestrian crossing. Liang repeatedly struck his shin on these obstacles while crossing the street, an experience encoded in the ironic title. From a sighted viewer's perspective, the image might appear to be a simple, context-free visual representation. However, upon learning the story behind the image, the audience typically found the work compelling and deeply meaningful. Inspired by this approach, the researcher and Mr. Jiang chose to adopt non-visual photography to document a traditional intangible cultural heritage workshop. Their objective was not only to represent the production process and final outcomes but to foreground the sensory, relational, and symbolic dimensions embedded in the act of image-making itself.

This orientation towards meaning-making through multisensory and embodied experience was echoed across the practices of other participating artists. The impact of visual impairment on artistic creation is multifaceted, shaping the selection of artistic expression methods, the exploration of creative processes, and the development of thematic content (Riegel & Robinson, 2023; Sorokin et al., 2023). Artists with visual impairment engaged in artistic practices through distinctive methods that incorporated non-visual sensory interactions. In this research, Mr. Wang, who retains faint light perception, demonstrated a heightened sensitivity to dazzling or refracted light. In the early phase of the collaborative project, he preferred materials that interacted with light and relied on residual vision to observe and experience various colours.

By contrast, Mr. Kong, who is totally blind, relied entirely on hearing and touch during his improvisational music performances, emphasising that *“muscle memory is a critical skill for all musicians, not just for those with visual impairment”* (personal communication, October 22, 2022). Such contrasts show how the onset and type of blindness channel different senses into primary creative roles, affirming a phenomenological view that distinct bodies disclose distinct perceptual worlds.

Visual feedback can still pose difficulties, especially in installation art, yet those challenges were mitigated through an integrative model in which sighted and blind collaborators layered their respective sensory strengths. Sighted partners handled the visual calibration of colour and lighting, while the artists with visual impairment foregrounded auditory, tactile, and olfactory dimensions. As discussed in Chapter 2, collaborative creative practice in disability arts is not merely additive but actively reconfigures dominant perceptual and spatial logics (Ferrarini, 2017; Morrison, 2022). It offers

a relational and negotiated model of knowledge production, in which embodied difference becomes a generative force rather than a limitation (Pink et al., 2017). The researcher came to regard this layering of perspectives as the very essence inherent in each of four collaborative projects, allowing the work to unfold without forcing a single sensory hierarchy. This mutual harmonisation echoes Daoist interdependence and, in CDS terms, dismantles the assumption that knowledge flows only from sighted helpers to blind creators.

Embodied imagination was most visible in the artists' handling of memory. In installation pieces Mr. Wang drew on his residual visual memory of geometric shapes, such as circles and triangles, and attributed to them affective meanings, interpreting circles as symbols of harmony, and triangles as expressions of sharpness. Linking sensory memory with symbolic form exemplifies imagination as a lived, bodily process. Ms. Xiao described an ongoing residual visual imagery, in which touch and sound stimulated vivid inner images, enabling her to perceive and regulate colour through embodied sensory memory in her creative make-up practice.

In one of her non-visual photography projects, Ms. Xiao described constructing a layered, spatially unfolding mental image. Beginning with the archway in front, she then perceived the pond behind, followed by the distant sounds of children playing and ducks swimming. This sequence, guided by auditory input and embodied positioning, formed a coherent three-dimensional scene, anchored in visual memory yet reassembled through non-visual modalities. This form of perceptual layering exemplifies how residual sight can intersect with other sensory pathways to generate richly textured creative visions.

Mr. Jiang offered a parallel perspective in the context of non-visual photography, describing it as an *“extension of perception”*. He elaborated that *“non-visual photography offers a comprehensive and holistic perspective”*, involving sensory interaction with textured materials like reeds, framing space through bodily perception rather than optics (personal communication, September 30, 2022). The result is a productive tension between residual visual traces and emergent tactile logic. Lakoff and Johnson’s (2008) theory of embodied cognition highlights that abstract knowledge is structured through motor schemas. Mr. Kong’s experience illustrates how those schemas can displace visual verification. As he explained: *“As improvisational performers, muscle memory can bring many unexpected surprises. What we pursue is sensory interaction and affective communication”* (personal communication, October 22, 2022).

As an adaptive and expressive mechanism, muscle memory enabled artists to navigate visual difference while generating intuitive, improvisational outcomes. In this way, motor schemas functioned as a foundation for creative intelligence, aligning with theories of embodied cognition. Through such multisensory strategies, the participating artists demonstrated alternative ways of imagining, remembering, and feeling. These creative approaches were not grounded in visual reproduction but in lived sensory resonance and experiential meaning-making. By challenging ocular-centric aesthetics, the artists expanded the parameters of contemporary art. Works built on muscle memory, sound mapping, or tactile installation contested the visual dominance embedded in modernist traditions and invited more inclusive exhibition practices. By foregrounding non-visual modalities, these practices not only broadened the expressive vocabulary of contemporary art but

also provoked critical reflections on accessibility, aesthetic hierarchies, and the epistemic authority of visual culture.

These insights confirm that artistic identity can be reconfigured through non-visual creation. Aligned with Daoist ideals of responsive embodiment and with CDS demands for sensory plurality, the artists' practices foreground non-visual modalities as valid modes of artistic inquiry. This opens generative pathways for both disability arts and contemporary art. Additionally, these artistic contributions stimulated wider discussions on accessibility and inclusive design, prompting more adaptive exhibition strategies and greater institutional awareness of sensory diversity in cultural programming. The developments also set the stage for deeper inquiry into how different art forms intersect and integrate within collaborative practice.

5.2.4 Sensory Uniqueness and the Reconstitution of Artistic Value

The preceding discussion has shown how visually impaired artists reconfigure artistic identity by working through non-visual modes of perception. Building on that analysis, this subsection turns to the generative logic of creativity itself, asking how the artists' multisensory practices transform uncertainty into opportunity and, in so doing, contest received definitions of artistic value. The argument developed here prepares the ground for the next chapter section, where attention shifts from individual strategies to the integration of multiple art forms within collaborative works.

The nature of creativity has long been debated. Pichot et al. (2022) regard creativity as a sequence of layered innovations. By contrast, Brandt (2021) insists that the question of effectiveness, whether a work succeeds with an audience, should be excluded from its definition, thereby separating private production from public reception. Runco (2022) maintains that creativity involves both

problem-finding and problem-solving, and Walia (2019) extends that view by framing creativity as a dynamic, self-directed process in which practitioners construct, reframe, and redefine the very problems they face. The relevance of these theoretical perspectives becomes evident in the present study. The participating artists with visual impairment in this research were not simply responding to predefined artistic challenges; instead, each artist actively renegotiated what constituted a creative problem through embodied and sensory modes of exploration. Such interventions challenge normative assumptions surrounding artistic capacity and call into question conventional understandings of what art is and how it comes into being.

Non-visual photographer Mr. Jiang offered a clear example. He described his practice as an “*extension of perception*” (personal communication, September 30, 2022). For Mr. Jiang, creative work began not with the camera lens but with tactile and auditory harmonisation to space; the resulting images translated a multisensory encounter rather than a strictly visual one. The essence of art-making, he argued, was to convey layered meanings and tell stories that resonated beyond the eye.

Make-up artist Ms. Xiao likewise reframed the creative act. She highlighted that perception was “*penetrative*” (personal communication, October 8, 2022), enabling access to subtle details often overlooked in visual practices. Her approach to fashioning beauty relied on calibrated touch and quantitative measurement, constituting a process that departed entirely from conventional sight-based cosmetic techniques. Her method challenged the default assumption that make-up should be inherently visual. At the same time, she advocated for greater interpretive autonomy for audiences, cautioning that excessive textual guidance could constrain imaginative engagement.

For improvisational dancer Mr. Su, creativity emerged from visceral resonance with environment and relation. *“The way I present myself,”* he explained, *“came from internal feelings and from whatever connection existed with others, not from vision”* (personal communication, July 11, 2022). Each performance introduced a fresh problem that was not solved through external choreography but through moment-by-moment bodily negotiation.

Musical improviser Mr. Kong articulated a complementary yet distinct view. Inspiration, he noted, accumulated affectively from life and ongoing practice; improvisation became a release that followed sustained internal build-up. Familiarity with a wide repertoire of instruments and styles enabled him to meld emotional state and environmental cues into novel sonic textures. In his experience, spontaneity was not the opposite of discipline; it was the cultivated capacity to act instantly when affect, memory, and environment converged.

Across these narratives, creativity was not framed as a compensatory response to impairment but, rather, as the active reconfiguration of sensory capacities into alternative artistic logics. The participating artists extended or reassigned the perceptual roles of touch, proprioception, and audition. Limitations were transformed into generative sites of experimentation, challenging the visual hegemony that typically governs artistic evaluation. This defiance of ocular-centric assumptions demonstrated that innovative aesthetic creation need not be visually anchored, nor reliant on vision as a privileged mode of engagement.

Such practices enacted Walia’s (2019) conceptualisation of creativity as an evolving and self-directed process, while also substantiating Brandt’s (2021) assertion that the creative act should be

analytically separated from its reception. Indeed, many of the most significant artistic insights within the collaborative projects emerged prior to any audience encounter.

The sensory strategies detailed in this section – tactile photography, haptic cosmetic application, visceral improvisational dance, and affectively driven musical composition – provide a conceptual bridge to the subsequent discussion in the next section. In doing so, this section addresses the research questions:

- RQ 1: How does the perceptual, social, and cultural construction of creative practice of the artists with visual impairment challenge prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art, and vision impairment in China and New Zealand?
- RQ 2: How do artists with visual impairment navigate and challenge visual-centric creative traditions?

The findings demonstrate how artists with visual impairment challenge ocular-centric creative paradigms and reconfigure dominant conceptions of artistic capacity through embodied, self-directed sensory practices. These insights depart from many previous studies on visual impairment and creativity, which often foreground compensatory strategies or situate artistic expression within therapeutic frameworks (Kaur & Bhat, 2019; Lazzouni & Lepore, 2014; Li et al., 2023). Unlike these approaches, which have largely drawn on experimental psychology, neuroimaging, or art therapy case studies to frame sensory difference as a deficit to be mitigated, this research foregrounds sensory difference as a generative resource for artistic innovation. Meanwhile, this study highlights the integration and layering of modalities as a central principle in collaborative and creative practice. Framed through Daoist and phenomenological resonance and CDS framework, this perspective

emphasises the embodied, situated, and culturally specific nature of artistic meaning-making. It offers a conceptual pathway rarely explored in Western sensory or disability art studies.

In the next section, the analysis shifts from discrete sensory modalities to the interplay among them, examining how collaborative artworks give rise to hybrid aesthetic vocabularies that further advance the principles of inclusive and multisensory creative practice.

5.3 Embodied, Multisensory Collaboration in Disability Art Practice

This section explores how the transdisciplinary integration of artistic forms – non-visual photography, improvised dance, improvisational music, and installation art – unfolded through embodied, sensory-rich collaboration between the researcher and artists with visual impairment. These co-creative processes were not only artistic experiments but also critical engagements with normative assumptions of perception, authorship, and what counts as valid artistic practice. They gave rise to alternative modalities of artistic expression, forged through touch, movement, rhythm, spatial harmonisation, and relational improvisation.

The collaborative process was deeply embodied, grounded in the physical and sensory engagement of all participants. Rather than conforming to visual paradigms, the work developed through non-visual, affective, and experiential modalities. In this context, creative collaboration functioned not merely as a method of production but as a site of transformation, where sensory hierarchies were unsettled and artistic identity reconfigured. The participating artists, relying on different perceptual logics shaped by visual impairment, brought deeply embodied artistic trajectories into dialogue with the researcher's visually grounded background in design and theoretical inquiry.

These differences introduced productive tensions and enabled meaningful complementarity as divergent modes of knowledge and creative expression converged.

As the interview data show, such practices resisted a one-directional flow of knowledge from the sighted researcher to the artists with visual impairment. Instead, the collaboration was marked by mutual harmonisation and negotiation. For instance, Mr. Kong described how improvisational music allowed for spontaneous affective communication, while Mr. Su's tactile choreographic collaborative practice challenged the assumption that vision is essential to dance. These insights reflect a Daoist sensibility of interdependence, in which meaning emerges through relational balance. From a CDS perspective, they underscore the importance of recognising embodied ways of knowing and affirming the value of diverse bodily experiences.

Spatiality and embodied perception emerged as central to the practices in this study. In particular, the artists demonstrated refined spatial perception through repetitive touch, auditory orientation, and proprioceptive alignment, constructing meaningful environments, not through visual mapping but through embodied engagement. These practices of place-making and spatial navigation were not secondary to aesthetic creation but, instead, constituted its experiential foundation. The space of collaborative practice became a site where perception was restructured and affective meaning was generated. This constitutes a process of sensory reconfiguration, not a compensatory model. Non-visual modalities are engaged as generative and autonomous sources of knowledge, challenging the presumption of visual primacy in artistic perception.

The following sections examine how this integration unfolded across different art forms. Section 5.3.1 focuses on sensory-affective exchange and bodily awareness in non-visual performance

and co-creation. Section 5.3.2 analyses how non-visual spatial perception shaped place-making and artistic creation. Section 5.3.3 turns to the redistribution of creative agency and the acknowledgement of alternative knowledge systems shaped by embodied experience, critically examining power relations and shared authorship within multisensory artistic collaboration.

This chapter addresses the following research questions:

- RQ 1: How does the perceptual, social, and cultural construction of creative practice of the artists with visual impairment challenge prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art, and vision impairment in China and New Zealand?
- RQ 2: How do artists with visual impairment navigate and challenge visual-centric creative traditions?
- RQ 3: How can the dual perspectives of the participant-researcher, as collaborator, co-developer, and curator, and the artists with visual impairment be integrated into creative practice as research?

5.3.1 Embodied Perception and Cross-sensory Affective Responses

This section explores how embodied awareness and cross-sensory engagement shaped the affective and perceptual strategies of participating artists. It examines how these strategies challenged visual-centric paradigms and offered alternative modes of creative meaning-making.

A. Perceiving through the Body. Within non-visual artistic creation, the participating artists engaged through embodied perception, an interplay of bodily sensation, spatial awareness, and creative intentionality. The practices illustrated how non-visual modalities, such as sound, touch, and proprioception, served as autonomous channels for artistic innovation and spatial understanding,

independent of visual reference. As outlined in Section 3.2.3, phenomenology frames the lived body as the medium through which the world is disclosed; Daoist thought (Section 3.2.2) locates knowing in the resonance of body and environment; and CDS (Section 2.2.2) treats embodied difference as an epistemic resource.

Interview data revealed that Mr. Kong constructed space through minute shifts in air pressure and sound reflection, “drawing” a three-dimensional mental map without optical cues. This perceptual strategy shaped his spatial orientation and movement, allowing him to “see” the surrounding world through embodied sensing. He further noted that specific olfactory cues evoked embodied memories, revealing the affective depth of sensory experience in his creative process (personal communication, October 22, 2022). These memories shaped the conceptual framing of his work, reflecting the interplay between personal history and cultural meaning. After completing his musical improvisations, he edited the recordings using screen reader software and tactile memory of the interface layout. Navigating through auditory feedback and keyboard commands, he adopted a multisensory approach to digital production. As a video blogger, Mr. Kong also films and edits his own content, relying on sound cues and interface familiarity to manage complex timelines.

A similar engagement with non-visual sensory modalities was evident in the non-visual photography project. Mr. Jiang and the researcher initially engaged with the photographic subject through tactile exploration and imaginative reconstruction, narrating the sensory and affective context behind the scenes while simultaneously capturing images and their material settings. This practice demonstrated how Mr. Jiang and the researcher constructed visual artworks through non-

visual sensory interactions, thereby challenging traditional photography's reliance on sight and critically challenging ocularcentrism.

These practices demonstrate how non-visual modalities enable sophisticated creative authorship, positioning embodied difference as a generative force rather than a limitation. The concept of the body schema, as articulated by Schettler et al. (2019), elucidates how kinaesthetic routines are pre-reflectively organised, thereby demonstrating the co-emergence of perception and action within embodied practice. This dynamic interplay of body and environment also resonates with Daoist philosophy, which understands knowing not as internal representation but as emergent resonance, where bodily responsiveness and environmental cues unfold meaning in continuous relational flow.

The dancer Mr. Su also demonstrated a perception of his body that encompassed both external stimuli and internal sensations. The documentary film (00:02:41–00:03:37) that accompanies this research vividly illustrates Mr. Su's first-person perspective, showing his modulating gesture through shifts in muscle tension and breath rhythm, communicating expansions of calm and contractions of conflict. Moreover, the improvisational framework of the practice enabled Mr. Su to express affective states through instinctive movement. During the exhibitions, visitors frequently asked how a dancer without sight could coordinate with a sighted partner. In practice, Mr. Su initiated the sequence, while the researcher supplied minimal tactile cues, *"a gentle touch on the arm"* (personal communication, July 11, 2022) to indicate rhythm or direction. Mr. Su's immediate response demonstrated that precise spatial negotiation could emerge from multisensory reciprocity rather than

optical surveillance. His heightened sensitivity ensured accurate orientation and continually shaped artistic decisions, producing fluid interactions attuned to both environment and partner.

Such observations challenge normative assumptions in dance studies that locate choreographic complexity in mirror-based visual alignment. Albright (2010) noted that contemporary dance often privileges sightlines and frontal staging. Mr. Su's process indicated that the flow of movement was shaped by bodily contact and tactile exchange, reflecting a choreographic process grounded in mutual sensing and embodied awareness. The resulting duet between Mr. Su and the researcher thus highlighted perceptual divergence and aesthetic insight.

To explore the theme of Time, Mr. Su and the researcher constructed a movement vocabulary in which slow, open gestures represented states of tranquillity, and sharp, constricted motions embodied internal conflict and tension. Although some visitors at the exhibitions appeared to struggle with interpreting the thematic content in the absence of knowledge about the underlying conceptual contrasts, Mr. Su and the researcher experienced them as a tactile-affective vocabulary unique to non-visual practice. This resonance aligns with Daoist emphasis on *guishen* (esteeming the body or honouring the body) (mentioned in Section 3.2.3), suggesting that creative expression arises through a somatic dialogue with the environment, rather than through visual dominance.

Taken together, the improvisational duet shows how embodied perception, integrating touch, proprioception, and non-verbal bodily signalling between partners, generates affective meaning and spatial coherence without visual reference. It exemplifies sensory reconfiguration: a redistribution of perceptual engagement that foregrounds non-visual modalities as generative forces in collaborative creativity.

B. Expressive Movement beyond Sight. Through collaboration between the researcher and the artists with visual impairment, this research challenges ocular-centric paradigms by demonstrating how expressive movement can emerge from tactile dialogue, embodied sensitivity, and instinctive perception. In particular, Mr. Su developed a unique improvisational language by attuning to breath rhythms, joint tension, and subtle touch-based cues while performing with the researcher (Ma, 2022d). This process evoked an effortless flow between body and environment, echoing philosophies that value harmony over control. These findings support a reconfiguration of aesthetic norms in contemporary dance, aligning with CDS's call to decentre normative visual hierarchies and recognise alternative sensory pathways as generative and valid forms of expression.

Mr. Su's process made visible the limitations of choreographic pedagogies that treat sight as dance's epistemic anchor. By refusing visual demonstration and instead negotiating force, timing, and spatial trajectory through touch, he exposed vision's contingency: sight can enrich dance, but it is not constitutive of dance. This repositions blindness from a perceived lack to a locus of sensory reconfiguration, aligning with CDS calls to recognise visual impairment as a site of creative possibility rather than a condition of deficiency. As a result, Mr. Su and the researcher gained greater creative freedom and expressive potential. The discovery prompted the researcher to reconsider how dance skills and stage presence might be defined and evaluated, advocating instead for a more inclusive, multisensory framework rooted in bodily awareness and instinctive perception.

Furthermore, non-visual improvisational dance offered a more inclusive mode of audience engagement. Conventional dance appreciation tends to rely on visual observation as the primary means of understanding movement and meaning. However, this study, by foregrounding non-visual

sensory modes, opened new possibilities for participation. For example, during the public exhibition events showcasing the process of improvisational dance performances, such as the Meteor Theatre Exhibition in New Zealand, members of the blind community were invited to “watch” the artwork. Sighted audiences were encouraged to close their eyes and engage with the performance through audio description, allowing perception to unfold naturally without visual control, an approach resonant with the Daoist principle of wu-wei, or effortless harmonisation with one’s surroundings.

As described by a local English-speaking blind audience member from Blind Low Vision (as mentioned in Section 4.2) during the exhibition at the Meteor Theatre in New Zealand (2024):

I have never watched documentaries because I thought it was a privilege for sighted people. This is my first time attending such an exhibition without relying on sight. I found I could appreciate dance through the narration or the sound of the documentary itself, feeling the rhythm of breathing and subtle changes in air pressure. It is a more immersive experience.

This response underscores the curatorial value of audio description as a shared imaginative apparatus, revealing its power to foster both accessibility and immersive experience. The use of audio description, delivered both on site (such as through descriptive narration in the installation art) and within the documentary film, was not only designed to make the content accessible for blind audiences but also to invite sighted viewers into a shared imaginative space. By relying on auditory cues, both groups were encouraged to construct sensory and emotional meanings beyond the visual, fostering a deeper, more inclusive aesthetic experience.

This method of engaging audiences, inviting them to “watch” through audio description and imaginative perception, challenges conventional modes of passive, observational art appreciation,

and, instead, it proposes that active, multisensory involvement fosters deeper artistic engagement and opens new imaginative possibilities.

C. Visceral Resonance and Affective Memory in Embodied Creation. The inner sensations described by Mr. Wang (installation artist) and Mr. Su (dancer) can be interpreted through a phenomenological lens as expressions of pre-reflective bodily intentionality. As Merleau-Ponty (2012) suggested, before any conceptual naming occurs, the living body engages with the world through kinaesthetic, proprioceptive, and affective flows. In this study, the term *visceral* therefore designates a field of embodied meaning that emerges prior to linguistic or cognitive mediation. Philosopher Tamsin Lorraine (2018), writing within the post-Merleau-Ponty tradition of embodied phenomenology, argued that acknowledging the body's capacity for perception, judgement, and spontaneous action destabilises the inherited mind-body split. This position directly challenges ocular-centric epistemologies that privilege detached visual observation. Instead, it affirms a redistributed, multisensory mode of knowing, one that also resonates with Daoist notions of *guishen* and *wu-wei*.

For artists with visual impairment, affective experience and non-visual perception are frequently deeply intertwined, jointly shaping their ways of understanding the environment and embodied difference. As Koncul (2019) argued, affective and visceral experiences precede conceptualisation and constitute a fundamental dimension of lived experience, particularly for individuals whose engagement with the world is not structured through visual dominance. This insight aligns with phenomenological approaches that foreground the body as the primary site of perception and meaning-making. Within this study, such a view is deepened through a Daoist understanding of *guishen* and spontaneous responsiveness to the environment (*wu-wei*), as well as through a CDS

framework that challenges the normativity of visual primacy. Rather than compensating for the absence of vision, the artists' sensory practices reveal a reconfiguration of perceptual modes and an alternative distribution of sensory attention, grounded in embodied difference.

In the process of interpreting affective and visceral experiences, non-visual sensory interaction functioned as a lens through which the artists with visual impairment experienced and understood the world. These experiences, whether positive or negative, enhanced the engagement of the artists with the surrounding environment, thereby enriching the complexity and depth of the perceptual encounters. This heightened perception simultaneously informed and shaped the creative processes of the artists. For instance, Mr. Su remarked in the interview:

I subconsciously closed my eyes, then felt the process about the space and music, or felt something like the wind ...The way I present myself, maybe more from my insider feeling, how I want to present myself or with this environment, what kind of link state is it with other people. Not in terms of vision. (personal communication, July 11, 2022)

The researcher reflected that this "link state" may encompass physical, affective, multisensory, or internal resonance, including visceral feelings (as mentioned in Section 3.2.3) that transcend visual perception. Such an approach aligns with affect theory, which highlights the pre-cognitive and embodied dimensions of experience, wherein movement, touch, and sensory awareness among dancers or artists with visual impairment function as channels for affective transmission beyond the visual realm (Seigworth & Pedwell, 2023).

Incorporating affective and visceral experiences into perceptual engagement of the artists enabled more multidimensional and diverse creative choices. Ongoing, in-depth exploration and

reflection throughout the project, combined with affective layering, gave rise to varied combinations of topics and forms. However, the affective and visceral states shaped by non-visual perception often expressed a unique inner condition that proved difficult for the artists with visual impairment to articulate verbally. To document these ineffable states, the researcher employed joint reflection sessions and embodied elicitation interviews. Mr. Wang had an understanding of this inner expression, referring to it as the visceral experiences:

There is a feeling of comfort or disgust, which is a different feeling between like and dislike. When you touch them, you may feel "Wow this is good" ... such feeling, it may be beyond our ears, mouth, and nose, it is more likely to be a mysterious feeling, of course, not too mysterious. It is the perception that we humans now cannot explain scientifically, we may not know enough about ourselves. (personal communication, July 11, 2022)

The affective and visceral experiences of the artists with visual impairment significantly influenced their sensitivity to non-visual stimuli, with this influence operating in a bidirectional manner (Koncul, 2022). For example, the textures they touched, the sounds they heard, and the scents they perceived functioned as mediums for expressing affective states, thereby contributing to a rich and layered sensory foundation for their artistic creations. Mr. Kong remarked:

Taste, when you are under a lot of stress and eat something good, it can help you relax ... Smell, you cannot see it, you cannot touch it, and you cannot taste it; it is a relatively niche sense. But for me, smell is something that can evoke memories. (personal communication, October 22, 2022)

For Mr. Kong, non-visual sensory stimuli functioned as pathways to affective and visceral experiences. A similar understanding was expressed by Mr. Wang in the context of the installation art project, as he believed that different material textures evoked distinct emotional responses. When discussing his selection of materials, Mr. Wang stated: *“You seem to have a unique way of feeling the materials ... when you touch a cat’s fur, it is so soft and cute. Very comfortable feel. But if you try a cactus, the contrast is huge”* (personal communication, July 11, 2022).

During his creative process, he translated these affective experiences into material representations. For example, rough surfaces were used to evoke sensations of turmoil and distress, whereas smooth, soft textures were associated with the qualities of clouds, conveying a sense of tranquillity and contentment.

Notably, the concept of visceral feeling emerged frequently in audience responses during the Chinese exhibitions but was largely absent in the New Zealand context. This divergence reflects culturally specific understandings of the body and perception, particularly within Daoist-inflected frameworks that regard the body as a site for ethical cultivation and aesthetic refinement (Cheng, 2017). Within such a paradigm, visceral feelings are not reduced to raw physiological data but are interpreted as meaningful, cultivated expressions of embodied harmonisation.

This study thus repositions visceral resonance as a culturally mediated mode of engagement, highlighting how embodied difference functions not merely as sensory substitution but as a generative resource within particular cultural and philosophical contexts. Rather than framing non-visual modalities as compensatory, the findings affirm their expressive potential when rooted in alternative embodied logics. These insights directly respond to the research question, “How do artists with visual

impairment navigate and challenge visual-centric creative traditions?" The development of embodied modes of perception, affectively rich and culturally meaningful, challenges normative conceptions of artistic expression based on sight.

5.3.2 Sensory Place-making and Environmental Affordance in Collaborative Storytelling

In this research, sensory ethnography and Sarah Pink's concept of place-making practice (2007, 2008, 2012) provide a critical lens through which to analyse how the artists with visual impairment construct creative spaces and express creativity through multisensory experiences. This approach aids in understanding how people develop a deep awareness of space and environment through the collaborative functions of touch, hearing, smell, and other senses.

Art, as a vital medium for expressing human thoughts, affection, and beliefs, profoundly impacts various aspects of society (Farrell, 2016). The body, as a central element in artistic practice, integrates individuals, materials, sensory interactions, language, and reflection to form a unified creative experience. Through this multisensory synergy, artists gradually establish a sense of place that embodies affective connection and cultural significance. For people with visual impairment, the spiritual fulfilment and self-actualisation derived from artistic experience are particularly meaningful. However, current artistic environments and experiences remain predominantly reliant on vision, and there is limited understanding of how the artists with visual impairment explore artistic diversity using existing technologies (Li et al., 2023).

This section focuses on how non-visual modalities, rather than functioning as substitutes for sight, serve as generative forces for spatial experience and artistic meaning-making. The analysis examines how artists with visual impairment engage in place-making through embodied interactions.

Each creative practice is further explored in terms of how it responds to and reshapes environmental affordances, defined as the possibilities for action and perception offered by specific materials, textures, and spatial conditions. Non-visual senses such as touch and hearing are positioned as central tools for constructing spatial awareness and creative expression.

At the same time, these practices reveal the limitations of sensory substitution models, particularly in cross-cultural contexts where interpretations of sensory inputs, such as texture, temperature, or scent, may differ significantly. The integration of assistive or interactive technologies also raises important questions regarding the enhancement of artistic diversity and the accessibility of multisensory expression. The concepts of place-making and affordance thus provide a critical framework for analysing the four collaborative art practices presented in this research.

A. Place-making through Multi-sensory Artistic Practices. This section explores how artists with visual impairment engage in place-making through embodied sensory interactions. Rather than relying on visual perception, the artists activate non-visual perceptual modes, such as touch, hearing, smelling and proprioception, to perceive environmental affordance and artistic expression.

In the exhibitions, non-visual photography was accompanied by audio descriptions and, in some cases, integrated sound and music. These multimodal elements distinguished it from conventional photography by foregrounding sensory imagination rather than visual observation. For audiences, engaging with non-visual photographs involved a dual-layered process: perceiving any available visual cues and simultaneously constructing mental imagery based on the photographer's verbal or auditory descriptions. The clarity and evocative quality of these descriptions played a crucial

role in shaping the viewer's imagined scene, transforming the act of interpretation into a co-creative sensory experience.

Ms. Xiao, the non-visual photographer in this study, described how she perceives place through auditory and tactile cues. She recalled:

When I was photographing models for my previous project, I visited several locations. If the ground is earthy, the space felt open because you could hear the sound of the wind. Above, you might hear the rustling of leaves, which indicates tall trees. You could touch the tree trunks and feel the vibrations of the leaves, giving you an understanding of the space and a certain feeling. (personal communication, October 8, 2022)

This account shows how spatial sense is co-composed through movement, sound reflection, and material feedback. When the researcher shared these interpretations with viewers during exhibitions, the responses varied based on the richness of the descriptions. Some imagined vivid spatial scenes through layered engagement; others found interpretation more difficult when verbal narratives were absent or vague (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024).

Importantly, Ms. Xiao explained that visual elements, such as the occlusion caused by a rock in front of a fountain, may be irrelevant or even obstructive in non-visual photography. She illustrated this point by stating:

Think about there's a rock here, an artificial hill, and a fountain. If you were photographing visually, the rock would actually block the lens. But when you go beyond vision, you can "see" or feel the sound of the fountain's water falling on the other side of the rock, along with the sounds of little ducks. (personal communication, October 8, 2022)

Such accounts reveal how non-visual cues penetrate spatial boundaries, contributing to an expanded spatial imagination that is not limited by line-of-sight conventions. Place-making has been conceptualised as a dynamic process involving walking, touching, and listening, interwoven with social relationships, personal memories, and cultural contexts, to construct the uniqueness of a place (Pink, 2015b). In Ms. Xiao's creative process, the construction of photographic scenes was not fixed but continuously redefined through embodied and multisensory engagement. This dynamic place-making process enabled Ms. Xiao to generate meaning in relation to her environment by drawing on tactile, auditory, and proprioceptive cues. Through non-visual perception, Ms. Xiao interpreted both affective dimensions of space, resulting in photographs that embodied personal resonance and affective depth. Each work conveyed multiple layers of experiential meaning shaped by her situated sensory interactions.

Mr. Jiang described a similarly embodied perceptual process. He regularly relied on auditory echoes and tactile contact to identify spatial markers and compose his photographic scenes. For instance, when photographing wind chimes, he used auditory cues to locate them and sensed wind direction and air temperature to construct an affectively rich understanding of place. Tactile engagement, such as feeling the surface, form, and vibration of the chimes, provided affective and narrative context to his work. As Mr. Jiang explained in the interview, the objects he photographed were not merely visual records but emotive carriers of understanding and memory, developed through sensory engagement. This emphasis on bodily-based perception aligns with contemporary sensory ethnographic frameworks and suggests that place-making, in these cases, is not about representing space, but about re-experiencing it through sensory attunement.

Mr. Kong extended this interpretation of place-making to everyday life. In addition to his musical practice, Mr. Kong maintains an active role as a video blogger, documenting aspects of everyday life through self-produced videos. These recordings include demonstrations of cooking from the perspective of a blind person and descriptions of his post-production process. Mr. Kong independently films and edits these materials, navigating editing software through auditory cues, screen reader support, and tactile familiarity with interface layouts. In the interview, he described forming a mental “*three-dimensional map*” based on non-visual cues. While his spatial imagery included imagined colours (e.g., green leaves in winter), the structural awareness remained accurate and dynamic. Such practices reflect the adaptive reorganisation of sensory experience and challenge conventional definitions of spatial knowledge as necessarily visual.

Despite these achievements, participants also acknowledged limitations. Mr. Kong noted that while touch can be systematic and effective in confined spaces, its spatial range is constrained. Similarly, auditory cues become less precise in large or acoustically complex settings. These reflections indicate the need to consider not only the creative potential of non-visual modalities, but also the environmental constraints and material affordances that shape sensory strategies.

The researcher, drawing from her background in visual communication and spatial design, found resonance between the participants’ embodied experience and her own understanding of spatial openness through negative space. In her reflexive notes, she recalled how certain spatial arrangements frequently evoke a sense of comfort and relaxation without being explicitly defined. This parallel, between non-visual spatial immersion and visual design intuition, underscored the possibility of cross-modal aesthetic principles rooted in embodied experience.

In addition, cultural context contributed meaningfully to the artists' interpretive process. Mr. Wang's (installation artist) and Mr. Su's (dancer) interpretations of spatial soundscapes drew from Chinese notions of natural harmony, while the researcher's spatial thinking emerged from both Eastern and Western design principles. The interplay of these perspectives enriched the collaborative process and foregrounded the need for culturally situated interpretations of place-making. These insights reveal not only the diversity of sensory strategies in collaborative practices but also their epistemic value in expanding the field of spatial aesthetics.

B. Spatial Construction through Memory and Cultural Interaction. This section investigates how artists with visual impairment construct spatial experience and meaning through the integration of memory, bodily interaction, and cultural materials. These processes reflect how spatial understanding is not only shaped by sensory input but also culturally mediated and temporally layered.

In the improvisational music practice, the researcher and the musician Mr. Kong collaboratively constructed a "*memory space*" (personal communication, October 22, 2022) through sound, rhythm, and muscle memory. In the creative process, sound functioned not only as a medium for musical expression but also as a bridge to evoke memories. As a creator with limited formal training in music, the researcher experimented with compositional methods suggested by Mr. Kong, incorporating specific sounds drawn from daily life and nature. For instance, Mr. Kong proposed integrating the rustling sound of a plastic grocery bag or the percussive tones produced by bowls of various shapes. As a result, the researcher selected different types of bamboo, modifying their tonal qualities and pitch by drilling holes, which enabled a composite performance using diverse bamboo sounds.

In the improvisational music project, Mr. Kong and the researcher collaboratively developed a sonic environment shaped by auditory rhythm, tactile familiarity, and muscle memory. While Mr. Kong incorporated sounds drawn from Western musical traditions, such as the violin, the researcher selected culturally resonant materials like bamboo and ceramics to reflect Chinese aesthetic values. The tonal variation achieved by modifying bamboo structures reflected a deliberate attempt to merge Chinese and Western sonic vocabularies.

Although the researcher lacked formal music training, Mr. Kong's guidance facilitated an experimental and intuitive creative process. Rather than relying on formal notation or visual cues, the collaborative practice between Mr. Kong and the researcher unfolded through affective resonance. This refers to a process in which affective sensitivity, cultural memory, and sonic responsiveness were exchanged across digital space. As mentioned in Section 2.3.3, Pors (2018) suggested affective resonance refers to the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected through shared intensities, even in the absence of physical proximity. In this context, auditory textures and rhythmic cues carried more than musical structure. These sonic elements transmitted mood, evoked cultural familiarity, and conveyed interpretive intent. Such sonic interactions enabled a co-creative dynamic grounded in mutual harmonisation and cross-cultural responsiveness, despite the lack of face-to-face interaction.

Within this sonic dialogue, Mr. Kong's embodied musical experience played a crucial role in shaping the collaborative flow. His reliance on bodily memory and kinaesthetic responsiveness exemplified how non-visual forms of musical knowledge can ground intuitive and affect-rich creation. For Mr. Kong, bodily memory served as a creative resource: through repeated practice, his hands naturally aligned with musical phrases, allowing him to perform with fluency independent of visual

cues. This kinaesthetic awareness activated a form of temporal place-making. As he explained, “*When I play something familiar, my body remembers the movement and I follow that flow. It becomes intuitive*” (personal communication, October 22, 2022).

The theme of the project “At present” also prompted reflection on time and spatial immediacy. Although physically located in different cities, the co-creation unfolded in real time, binding asynchronous lives into a shared musical moment. The researcher noted: “*Even though we worked from different places, I felt we entered the same emotional time-space through the music, like we were present together*” (Reflective journal, December 2022).

Through music, the musician and the researcher connected the past, present, and future, fostering an affective resonance that enabled place-making within improvisational music. This process facilitated an exploration not only of present spatiality but also of layered memory and emotion, resulting in the creation of a deeply personal and meaningful artistic space. This affective simultaneity contrasted with linear time and highlighted music’s potential to create relational space across distance.

In the improvisational dance project, the dancer, Mr. Su, developed a heightened sensitivity to the affordances of his immediate environment: grass texture, wind direction, ground density, and subtle leaf vibrations. These elements did not simply occupy the stage but co-shaped it through movement. With each gesture, the dancer constructed a responsive space, redefined in real time through bodily engagement.

Unlike sighted dancers who navigate primarily through visual cues, Mr Su’s spatial practice relied on heightened bodily awareness and a refined sensitivity to tactile and atmospheric change. He oriented himself through grass underfoot, shifts of wind, the grain of the ground, and the crackle of

fallen leaves, building a stage-world that unfolded dynamically with every gesture. Each movement reshaped this world in real time, producing a layered, embodied sense of place.

Mr. Su often spoke of an “*ineffable feeling*” (personal communication, July 11, 2022) that guided his spatial improvisation, an internal bodily awareness shaped by real-time engagement with his surroundings. Rather than planning gestures in advance, he responded instinctively to shifts in wind, the texture underfoot, or the density of the air. In this context, perception was not filtered through deliberate reflection or visualised representation but emerged through immediate embodied harmonisation. This intuitive orientation echoes traditional Chinese understandings of bodily harmony with the environment, where knowing arises through presence, movement, and subtle resonance with the world.

When asked about visualising imagined scenes, Mr. Su differed from the other artists: he deliberately eschewed mental images, remaining wholly present to the sensory flux of the moment. This emphasis on here-and-now aligns with the Daoist stillness-in-movement, allowing affective memory and embodied intuition, rather than visual narrative, to anchor place-making. In doing so, his practice demonstrates how non-visual choreography can cultivate a multisensory aesthetic that is at once immediate, culturally situated, and generatively unpredictable.

In the installation art practice, Mr. Wang fostered a sense of place through tactile engagement with diverse materials, using touch to activate memory and kindle associative spatial experience. Working within a Chinese cultural frame, this collaborative project between Mr. Wang and the researcher explored the multiplicity of self by juxtaposing textures that ranged from smooth cellophane to soft silk. As viewers handled these curated materials, the act of tactile exploration

invited a mapping of sensory impressions onto individual biographical narratives, foregrounding an embodied, multisensory mode of self-recognition that challenged visual primacy.

To deepen this cultural dialogue, Mr. Wang and the researcher embedded identity labels specific to contemporary Chinese society, such as “second-generation rich” and “urban-rural fringe”, directly onto the tactile materials. As viewers touched these embedded tags, many experienced immediate affective reactions and personal recollections. These responses reflect what Ahmed (2004) described as affective economies, where signs and labels do not merely represent meaning but circulate through bodies to generate visceral responses. In this case, cultural signifiers became materially embodied, activating affective memories and sensory impressions that transformed the act of touching into a process of personalised place-making. This approach echoes Cheng’s (2017) Daoist reading of *guishen*, which situates the body not only as a vessel of perception but as a site of cultural inscription and affective resonance. Through these tactile encounters, the sensing body emerged as the primary medium of knowledge-making, interweaving memory, identity, and spatial imagination.

Layering rough and smooth, cool and warm, Mr. Wang and the researcher fashioned a “*memory space*” (personal communication, July 11, 2022) that exceeded the installation’s physical bounds, much as phenomenologists describe place as experienced horizon rather than fixed container (Malpas, 2018). The work thus became a multisensory journey, urging participants to see through touch and to think through feeling. Yet during the exhibition at Waikato University, certain culturally specific elements, such as the character profile cards drawn from Chinese contemporary life, were not immediately legible to viewers unfamiliar with these social references. While these cards embodied everyday archetypes and affective tropes recognisable within a Chinese context, some participants

from different cultural backgrounds interpreted them more as abstract artistic expressions. This illustrates how visceral resonance relies not only on sensory engagement but also on culturally situated literacy and shared symbolic frameworks.

Throughout the process Mr. Wang spoke of an ineffable, Daoist-inflected awareness, a tacit harmonisation achieved by *“listening with the skin”* rather than viewing with the eyes (personal communication, July 11, 2022). Framed phenomenologically, such awareness exemplifies pre-reflective bodily intentionality; framed by CDS, it reconfigures sensory hierarchies, redistributing aesthetic authority away from vision towards a plural sensorium. Consequently, the installation enacted a form of visceral place-making in which body, material, and cultural memory were co-constitutive, offering participants a space that was at once immediate, affectively layered, and open to reinterpretation. These examples demonstrate how spatial meaning-making emerges through embodied, multisensory interactions, thereby responding to RQ 1 (How does the perceptual, social and cultural construction of creative practice of the artists with visual impairment challenge prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art and vision impairment in China and New Zealand?) by illustrating how non-visual artistic knowledge is co-produced across cultural and sensory modalities.

5.3.3 Negotiating Power and Co-producing Knowledge in Inclusive Art Practice

In each collaborative project, the evolving relationship between the researcher and the artists with visual impairment shaped not only the formal direction of the works but also their underlying meaning. Establishing a reciprocal bridge between power and knowledge was therefore essential to fostering an ethical and inclusive co-creative environment. While such negotiation is pertinent to most forms of collaboration, it holds particular significance in this study. This is due to the pronounced

divergence in sensory modalities, disciplinary backgrounds, and positionalities between the collaborators.

The distinct differences in perceptual modalities, disciplinary training, and social positioning between collaborators introduced both creative potential and structural challenges. The extent to which power dynamics could be acknowledged and balanced, along with the practical strategies used to achieve such balance, formed a central focus of this section. The inherently relational nature of these projects required ongoing negotiation of roles, expectations, and modes of contribution prior to each partnership. In all four art projects, extended online discussions were conducted between the researcher and the artists with visual impairment, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown in China in 2022. These dialogues addressed both artistic vision and collaborative logistics. As Metz et al. (2019) noted, co-creative practices require deliberate clarification of shared goals and mutual expectations from the beginning. Given the significant divergences in perceptual experience and creative methodologies, such discussions served as a foundational phase in the collaborative process, helping to reconfigure traditional hierarchies of artistic authorship.

Unsurprisingly, the communication process was not uniformly smooth. Some of the artists had more extroverted dispositions, which facilitated the progression of collaborative activities. Others, however, were more accustomed to working independently and found communication and collaboration more challenging. In such cases, the researcher needed to engage more deeply in dialogue and offer additional support to foster mutual understanding.

This required a conscious shift away from dominant visual paradigms, embracing tactile and auditory modes of exchange. Such an embodied adjustment resonates with both the ethics of access

and inclusion and the relational ethics articulated in disability arts research (Rice et al., 2018), which emphasise responsiveness to sensory difference and the co-creation of accessible communicative spaces. This process served as a valuable learning experience for the researcher, prompting reflection on questions such as whether one party's vision should dominate or whether a cumulative, reciprocal exchange should guide the collaborative practices, an approach requiring ongoing adjustment.

As dialogue evolved, creative autonomy no longer resided with a single party but instead shifted towards a more balanced and reciprocal partnership. This co-creative dynamic fostered an environment of mutual learning: the researcher gained enriched insights into non-visual sensory worlds while the artists benefited from the methodological and theoretical structures introduced by the researcher. Through this evolving exchange, the boundary between researcher and participants became more fluid, enabling each to contribute from their position of experiential and professional expertise. The collaborative relationship thus exemplified a reflexive, embodied epistemology in which knowledge is generated through relational practice rather than imposed structures.

For instance, in the improvisational dance project, the creative team (Mr. Su and the researcher) focused on "improvisation", a concept characterised by openness and multiplicity. The central topic of the project was "Time", interpreted not as a linear progression but as an unfolding sensory experience shaped by interaction. The team explored the transmission of meaning via the temporal dimension of movement, requiring real-time sensory feedback and continual adaptation during the creative process. While inspiration emerged through spontaneity, achieving coherence and affective flow demanded a degree of rational structuring. This creative tension between fluidity and form mirrors the principle of responsiveness arising from embodied interaction rather than external

design. In this context, improvisation becomes both a method and a philosophy: one that honours difference, mutual presence, and shared transformation.

During the collaborative dance creation with Mr. Su, the researcher initially developed a detailed plan, including envisioned scenes and carefully timed interactions. However, once the improvisation began, she found it difficult to maintain control; much of the plan dissolved, and she began relying entirely on muscle memory. This embodied shift echoed a point raised by Mr. Kong in his interview, where he noted that over 99% of his violin performance, like that of most professional musicians, relied not on visual cues but on muscle memory.

Muscle memory, here, can be understood as the integration of tactile feedback, proprioception, and neural repetition, an embodied intelligence that operates beneath conscious control. While this process is typically internal to the individual, in collaborative improvisation it becomes relational: a dynamic, intersubjective sensorium in which movement, affect, and intention are continually negotiated. Scholarship on contact improvisation within disability arts has emphasised how such practices rely on intercorporeal attunement, shared weight, and reciprocal sensory responsiveness, foregrounding embodiment as a relational and negotiated process rather than an individualised capacity (Kimmel et al., 2018). From this perspective, collaborative improvisation can be understood as a site of real-time sensory exchange in which embodiment, affect, and power are continually redistributed through touch, movement, and mutual responsiveness.

This raises a key analytical question concerning how intercorporeal interaction operates as a site of real-time sensory exchange, in which embodiment, affect, and power are continually redistributed. While dancers may regulate their own internal multisensory rhythms, coordinating

across bodies presents greater complexity. Although the researcher was fully immersed in the interaction, she often found herself adjusting her movement to accommodate what she perceived as Mr. Su's needs, assuming that his visual impairment required extra cues. Yet Mr. Su performed with fluid confidence, suggesting a groundedness in his own embodied, non-visual orientation.

This asymmetry reveals how normative assumptions about ability can inadvertently shape dynamics, even within well-intentioned collaborative practice. The researcher's perception of Mr. Su's supposed reliance on guidance was, in fact, misplaced. Mr. Su's autonomy in the process unsettled the visual normativity embedded in the researcher's expectations and invited a reconsideration of whose sensory mode is considered authoritative in guiding co-creation.

These observations highlighted several challenges within the collaborative process, particularly in relation to balancing power and negotiating differing sensory modalities of interaction. As a sighted researcher working alongside artists with visual impairment, it became imperative to critically reflect on potential asymmetries embedded in the co-creative structure. How can one establish an equitable, collaborative relationship without unintentionally centring their own perceptual framework? How might both the researcher's and the artists' subjectivities be acknowledged and negotiated in ways that foster mutual agency and shared authorship?

In collaborative artistic projects involving artists with visual impairment, power dynamics play a pivotal role in shaping not only creative processes but also their outcomes. Addressing such dynamics requires critical awareness of implicit hierarchies that may arise from divergent sensory experiences, disparities in artistic expertise, and varying degrees of familiarity with collaborative engagement. Drawing on Critical Disability Studies and phenomenological perspectives, power in

collaborative art practices can be understood as operating through normative assumptions about perception, communication, and authorship, which shape who is recognised as a legitimate contributor and whose knowledge is valued. From this perspective, aesthetic and collaborative arrangements structure participation by privileging certain sensory modalities, modes of expression, and decision-making practices over others. This framework is particularly relevant to rethinking the evolving distribution of roles and decision-making power in collaborative art practices.

Power dynamics may manifest in multiple ways. For instance, sighted practitioners might inadvertently dominate the collaborative process by defaulting to visual modes of communication and interpretation. Conversely, artists with visual impairment, particularly the artists who are more accustomed to solo practice, might assert control in ways that inadvertently constrain the collaborative dynamic. In both cases, these tendencies risk marginalising other voices and limiting shared exploration. Cultivating an inclusive and balanced environment requires a deliberate openness to multiple ways of sensing, knowing, and creating, alongside continuous reflexivity about one's own perceptual assumptions.

Acknowledging the potential for imbalance marked an essential first step. In the practice between the researcher and the artists with visual impairment, such imbalances manifested through mismatches in sensory modes, particularly the dominance of visual communication, and disparities in cognitive or professional backgrounds. However, successful collaboration required avoiding the exaggeration of such differences. Rather, the process demanded mutual respect and attentiveness to each other's creative and perceptual orientations. As Mr. Kong remarked: *"It is about equality, what's*

normal for us should be normal, not exaggerated or overemphasised, just mutual respect for each other's state" (personal communication, October 22, 2022).

Importantly, respect did not imply dependence. Striking a balance between autonomy and responsiveness remained one of the most challenging aspects of the process. Fostering genuine interaction and ensuring equal participation in decision-making were key strategies in redistributing collaborative agency. As Mr. Kong noted: *"Collaboration emphasises interaction ...You cannot say I recorded something, then I guess what you are doing, and then I accompany your music; accordingly, that is not interaction"* (personal communication, October 22, 2022).

Allowing the conceptual theme to evolve, and being open to shifts in creative direction, also proved vital. As Mr. Kong reflected: *"The idea at the beginning and the idea in the end were completely different"* (personal communication, October 22, 2022).

Valuing process and acknowledging subjectivity were particularly crucial in improvisational projects, where flexibility and openness often superseded pre-established structure. Although the collaborative topic had been discussed early on, the nature of improvisation inherently prioritised spontaneity and moment-to-moment responsiveness. Embracing this temporal immediacy became a critical aspect of working non-visually. Mr. Kong explained: *"I think many times we might excessively worry about our performance and presentation; even as experienced performers, we might excessively worry about our own performance"* (personal communication, October 22, 2022).

Ethical collaboration demands attention to representation, authorship, and the distribution of voice. As Rice et al. (2018) cautioned, disability arts practices are at risk of symbolic inclusion, where participants with disabilities are welcomed in name but marginalised in practice. Although invited to

participate, they may be excluded from meaningful decision-making, thus undermining their right to self-expression and creative autonomy. In historical and institutional settings such as medical education and ethics-regulated research, “disabled bodies were displayed in parts; faces covered with black boxes” (Rice et al., 2018, p. 8). As Rice et al. (2018) noted, these anonymisation practices, common in medical imagery and upheld by research ethics boards, were intended to protect participants but regularly resulted in their objectification. In disability arts research, such practices may inadvertently reproduce the dehumanising visual logics of clinical representation, undermining the agency and authorship of the participants with disability who seek to be visible as artists rather than anonymised subjects. This inherited visual regime, rooted in medicalised anonymity, risks silencing the expressive and political force of disability arts. Against this backdrop, these insights underscore the need for collaborative frameworks that centre artists with disability not merely as subjects but as co-authors of creative meaning.

The principle of “Nothing about us without us” (Charlton, 1998, p. 13), long advocated by disability rights movements, underscores the imperative of co-ownership in creative processes involving disabled participants. This ethos translates into specific collaborative practices that promote both agency and equity. For example, co-authored audio descriptions and shared copyright agreements functioned as both ethical safeguards and practical mechanisms for ensuring inclusion (Atenas et al., 2020).

Acknowledging the unique contributions of artists with visual impairment was key to ensuring their voices were not only heard but structurally embedded in all phases of the creative process. In response to the structural exclusion created by visual-centric norms, the project emphasised

collaborative methods that valued diverse sensory experiences and supported equal participation in creative decision-making. Ongoing dialogue and iterative feedback played a critical role in addressing these concerns. Repeated cycles of exchange between the artists with visual impairment and the researcher helped mitigate bias and ensure that final creative outputs genuinely reflected the artists' lived experiences, creative agency, and intentions. Rather than imposing a top-down framework, the researcher worked to cultivate an environment where mutual learning and reflexivity guided the direction of both form and meaning.

The question of ownership was not merely legal but also relational. While the researcher contributed theoretical and methodological insight, the embodied knowledge and sensory experience of the artists formed the core of the creative outputs. Ensuring a balanced distribution of credit acknowledged this co-dependence and fostered equity within the collaboration. As such, the ethics application for this research formally specified that full copyright of the artworks would remain with the artists with visual impairment. The researcher retained only the right to include the works in the thesis, academic publications, and presentations.

Inclusive collaborative structures, grounded in reflexivity and mutual respect, enabled disabled and non-disabled collaborators to negotiate authorship and transform normative creative hierarchies. Building on this, the next section turns to how the artists themselves conceptualised their creative practices as a means of challenging dominant interpretations of both art and disability. The perspectives from the artists with visual impairment reveal how multisensory expression, cultural identity, and lived experience were mobilised to redefine what counts as artistic value, authorship, and meaning beyond normative aesthetic frameworks.

5.4 Challenging Normative Interpretation of Art and Disability

Building on the analysis of collaborative structures in Section 5.3, this section examines how the artists with visual impairment actively contested normative interpretations of art and disability through creative practices and conceptual reflections. Organised into four interrelated parts, the section explores: (1) the opportunities and challenges encountered within collaborative processes; (2) the broader creative, social, and institutional impacts of these interventions; (3) the reframing of disability identity through lived, embodied experience; and (4) the symbolic and aesthetic role of Braille in shaping multisensory artistic meaning. In doing so, this section responds to two research questions:

- RQ 1: How does the perceptual, social, and cultural construction of creative practice of the artists with visual impairment challenge prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art, and vision impairment in China and New Zealand?
- RQ 2: How do artists with visual impairment navigate and challenge visual-centric creative traditions?

Rather than being treated as discrete themes, these four aspects are approached as interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The challenges artists faced in navigating non-visual collaborative practices (Section 5.4.1) directly informed the social and institutional responses to the artists' work (Section 5.4.2), which in turn shaped how the artists articulated their own disability interpretations and aesthetic understanding (Section 5.4.3). Braille, as explored in Section 5.4.4, emerged both as a creative response to accessibility constraints and a symbolic medium for asserting embodied authorship, reflecting the intertwining of artistic method, material politics, and cultural

belonging. Taken together, these analyses demonstrate how non-visual practices generated an epistemological shift, reconfiguring both art and disability as relational, embodied, and reflective processes rather than fixed categories or outcomes.

5.4.1 Opportunities and Challenges in the Collaborative Practices

The interview data revealed two central challenges encountered by the artists with visual impairment: reconfiguring artistic practices outside visual conventions and critically reflecting on societal attitudes towards disability. The reflections shared by each artist demonstrated a nuanced awareness of how disability and artistic identity intersect to contest mainstream visual norms and to reimagine creativity beyond conventional frameworks.

Firstly, creativity for many participants was not defined by visual interpretation. Rather than relying on sight or prioritising visual aesthetics, the artists emphasised affective resonance and relational engagement. The creative processes were grounded in non-visual senses and affective experiences. As Ms. Xiao observed: *“The most enjoyable way to appreciate art is to have your own thoughts and interpretations rather than being told what to think, as if it were pre-chewed for you”* (personal communication, October 8, 2022).

Similarly, Mr. Kong noted: *“We mainly focus on our own emotions and feelings”* (personal communication, October 22, 2022).

These reflections challenge ocular-centric paradigms by affirming that artistic expression can emerge from multisensory perception, embodied experience, and imaginative engagement. These findings diverge from dominant frameworks that continue to interpret disability art primarily through compensatory or therapeutic lenses (Bucharová et al., 2020; Leahy & Ferri, 2024). In contrast, this

study reveals how non-visual creative practices function as generative modes of meaning-making, reshaping aesthetic values through affective, relational, and embodied modalities.

In terms of disability, participants presented an alternative understanding that foregrounds ability and epistemological diversity. Several artists described disability as a socially constructed category, arguing that environmental and attitudinal barriers impose more significant limitations than physical impairments. This interpretation aligns with the perspectives advanced by CDS, which frame disability as a cultural and relational construct rather than a medical deficit (Goodley et al., 2019). Many participants rejected conventional notions of "normality", instead embracing each individual condition as a form of embodied difference. For instance, Ms. Xiao employed the analogy of a three-legged versus a four-legged stool to suggest that functional difference should be interpreted contextually rather than hierarchically, thereby challenging normative assumptions of ability. As she remarked: *"There is a book called Seeing the Unseen World. It mentions that blindness is not a state of lack. It is not like a four-legged stool missing one leg but rather a three-legged stool by nature"* (personal communication, October 8, 2022).

She added the following about her sensory navigation: *"Like I mentioned about penetrating space, when we walk, we can sense inclines and declines, whereas visually, you might miss terrain changes due to obstacles like billboards. Your steps can sense whether you're on a hill or incline"* (personal communication, October 8, 2022). This analogy highlights how spatial awareness may arise through non-visual sensory channels, reframing disability as an alternative sensory orientation rather than a limitation.

Despite this reframing, participants voiced frustration over the persistent stereotyping faced in daily life. Mr. Kong discussed the patronising attitudes he had encountered, while Ms. Yu expressed discomfort with the different evaluative standards frequently applied to her work. Many artists in this research raised concerns about disability-related terminology in the Chinese cultural context, reflecting on evolving discourses and the need for more inclusive representation. For instance, Mr. Jiang discussed state-regulated standards in media portrayal, and Mr. Wang reflected on shifts in public discourse over the past decade.

Participants' understandings of disability were also shaped by cultural experiences across different regions. While Mr. Kong reflected on his exposure to American attitudes, Ms. Yu described her encounters in the United Kingdom. The others, including Mr. Jiang, Mr. Wang, Mr. Su, and Ms. Xiao, spoke from experiences in China. These cross-cultural comparisons highlighted systemic differences in access, representation, and institutional support for artists with disability, reinforcing the need for context-specific approaches to inclusive practice.

A recurring theme in the interviews was the distinction between congenital and acquired visual impairment. Many artists discussed how the presence or absence of visual memory shaped creative approach and perceptual experience. Mr. Wang and Mr. Kong also noted the differences between long-term and temporary visual deprivation, warning against simplistic interpretations of blindness by non-disabled observers. This critique pointed to the limitations of short-term "blindfolded" simulation practices that fail to capture the lived, embodied realities of visual impairment. Such artistic exercises may inadvertently lead non-disabled or sighted audiences to

misinterpret or overread the experience of visual impairment, reinforcing reductive or inaccurate assumptions.

The researcher's artistic methodology was primarily based on visual principles, such as composition, colour, and spatial form, aiming to generate immediate visual impact and communicate conceptual depth efficiently. In contrast, the artists with visual impairment typically did not rely on sight in the creative processes, instead emphasising sensory modalities such as touch, proprioception, and auditory cues. Mr. Su, for example, explicitly described vision as a potential hindrance in his practice, noting that: *"Some people even feel that vision is an obstacle for them ..."* (personal communication, July 11, 2022).

This divergence revealed the need for reflexive strategies in collaborative work. The researcher gradually recognised that an inclusive sensory structure could not be imposed uniformly but must adapt to the intentions and context of each project. While visual methods offer immediacy and clarity, non-visual approaches emphasise depth, bodily presence, and relational harmonisation. A key insight that emerged was the importance of determining a leading sensory mode, visual or non-visual, depending on the project's objectives, while integrating the other as a complementary layer.

Such an approach resists the idea of sensory substitution and instead embraces sensory redistribution, allowing for creative practices that honour both difference and integration. By adapting to project-specific dynamics, the collaboration enabled more inclusive and equitable forms of artistic co-creation, grounded in mutual respect and shared authorship.

Despite these challenges, the collaborative process also revealed significant opportunities for transforming artistic norms and practices. By foregrounding non-visual modalities, such as touch,

hearing, and proprioception, the artists with visual impairment contributed to a broader redefinition of creativity and artistic communication. These practices challenged conventional expectations of aesthetic production and reception. By foregrounding tactile, auditory, and proprioceptive methods alongside visual elements, the artists reinterpreted how art can be experienced, communicated, and co-created. Moreover, the researcher's evolving awareness of sensory differences enabled the development of reflexive strategies that respected diverse perceptual orientations while fostering co-ownership and mutual learning. These opportunities not only expanded the conceptual and methodological scope of artistic collaboration but also affirmed the epistemological value of disability as a generative and relational force in creative practice.

5.4.2 Creative, Social, and Institutional Impacts of Non-visual Art Practices

The artistic interventions in this research significantly influenced personal growth, social participation, institutional inclusion, and technological innovation. For the four artists with visual impairment involved in the collaborative projects, these practices supported a deepened engagement with non-visual sensory modalities and cultivated distinct aesthetic approaches. The reshaping of sensory frameworks beyond vision emerged as a central dimension of the artists' creative development.

To begin with, the artists described a noticeable enhancement in the artistic capacities during the interviews. Participation in collaborative practice stimulated new creative directions and prompted reflexive insights. Mr. Wang, for example, incorporated concepts and artistic forms explored during the project into his subsequent residency work. Similarly, Mr. Kong described the affective progression and transformation of inspiration within his creative process:

You might encounter certain life events or experiences. Then there's a build-up of emotions, which eventually leads to an outburst. This outburst might be expressed through music or poetry ... When you're inspired and you write it down, you might feel fantastic at that moment ... it becomes more of a logical and rational editing process. (personal communication, October 22, 2022)

This reflection demonstrates how affective intensity and logical editing co-exist within artistic expression, affirming the layered nature of creative processes among artists with visual impairment.

Moreover, a key theme that emerged was the contrast between spontaneous improvisation and structured planning. The researcher, trained in visual design, was more accustomed to conceptual pre-planning. In contrast, the artists frequently employed improvisational techniques grounded in sensory attunement and bodily responsiveness. This contrast suggested a potential phenomenological divergence between the researcher and the participants, particularly in relation to the temporality of artistic intention and the role of bodily awareness. Although not uniformly representative of all participants, this divergence revealed meaningful variations in experiential and creative orientation, differences shaped by distinct relationships with time, embodiment, and intentionality within artistic practice. Mr. Su considered improvisation as an affective process closely tied to mood and embodied decision-making:

In this process, there are many things that can change along with your mood and feelings ... in the end, it is something that comes from your feelings in that moment that makes you take some actions or make choices ... But when we work together, for me, honestly, it's hard to control the impromptu movements with my partners. Maybe I thought of something at this

moment, I want to express it. But the expression does not always work well together or have a good contact. In other words, I may use some ways to respond to you or not respond to you. In a word, I will make a choice, at the specific point. (personal communication, July 11, 2022)

These accounts suggest that improvisation, for these artists, is neither random nor unstructured but, rather, a dynamic interplay between affective response, embodied memory, and creative intentionality. Unlike earlier studies that frame improvisation in disability arts as a form of emotional release or therapeutic catharsis (Kafer, 2013; Koch et al., 2019), this research highlights how artists approach improvisation as an intentional and epistemic process. Such practice is grounded in bodily awareness, affective responsiveness, and situated sensory engagement shaped through collaboration. Mr. Kong expanded on this view:

When it comes to improvisation, it is just a performance. But when you write it down, it might be a record or even get published in the future. It is not just about impulsiveness or sentimentality, but also the application of rationality and logic. In a sense, improvisation is random, but when this randomness is rationalised, it becomes a logical process. Spontaneity serves as the emotional source of creative inspiration, while logic and rationality are key to producing and presenting quality work to audiences. (personal communication, October 22, 2022).

These statements illustrate the hybrid nature of non-visual creative practice, where immediacy and structure converge. The artistic interventions thus supported not only aesthetic innovation but also self-awareness, fostering personal growth through expanded sensory and expressive vocabularies.

Artistic interventions had a profound impact on creative development, social engagement, institutional accessibility, and technological innovation. The participating artists with visual impairment demonstrated multifaceted growth, including conceptual development, heightened sensory attunement, and inspiration for new artistic forms. As Mr. Wang noted, the project's creative methods and reflexive models, such as the installation art topic My XXX, which explored layered social identities, inspired him to incorporate sensory-based content and techniques into subsequent work. This integration enabled the production of more nuanced and textured forms of artistic expression. The emphasis on the sensory dimension aligned with the participants' understanding of artistic growth, wherein heightened sensory awareness beyond vision was regarded as essential.

Non-visual sensory experience prompted new insights into improvisation, spontaneity, and affective expression. Mr. Su and Mr. Kong's reflections illustrated how improvisation relied on affective states and bodily responsiveness rather than visual preconception. These insights contributed to the formation of intuitive and emotionally resonant artworks that deepened both process and output.

The social dimension of artistic interventions was equally significant. The artworks produced through these collaborations played a transformative role in reshaping public perceptions of visual impairment and artistic capability. As Mr. Jiang described, non-visual photography functioned as "*a bridge connecting the art form to its audience*" (personal communication, September 30, 2022). This metaphor articulated how non-visual practices facilitated new forms of connection between creative work and spectatorship. By centring non-visual modalities, these practices invited audiences to reimagine art beyond ocular norms. Exhibitions in China and Aotearoa New Zealand fostered

participatory engagement, enabling visitors to encounter artworks through tactile and auditory pathways. For instance, Mr. Wang's interactive piece *Dark Kitchen* required audiences to navigate through tactile exploration, enhancing awareness of non-visual modes of perception. Mr. Su noted that audience members often attributed meaning to his dance movements based on personal affective responses, even when gestures were not intentionally choreographed: "*For the audience, they actually don't know whether my standing there was intentional or a mistake*" (personal communication, July 11, 2022).

This comment speaks to the openness of interpretation inherent in non-visual and improvisational forms. Such engagements not only encouraged deeper empathy but also destabilised assumptions about intentionality and meaning in performance.

At the institutional level, the collaborative projects advocated for inclusive exhibition formats that extend beyond visual dominance. Mr. Wang's installation exemplified how tactile interaction could be integrated within gallery settings. These practices highlighted both the possibilities and the limitations of current accessibility infrastructures. While galleries in different regions, such as MoMA in New York (the United States) or the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, have introduced accessibility aids (e.g., sensory kits, tactile maps), the exhibitions in this research demonstrated how local policy and institutional readiness shaped the implementation of inclusive features.

Technological innovation also featured prominently in the artists' practices. Non-visual photography inspired new sensory-led approaches to image-making. The use of digital tools, such as screen-readers and mobile AI assistants, expanded access to production and editing software. For example, while volunteering with Blind Low Vision New Zealand, the researcher observed a preference

for voice-command systems like Siri. In China, however, screen-reading software enabled blind users to consume text-based content at rapid speeds, illustrating regional differences in technological adaptation.

The documentary film produced during the project incorporated audio description as a strategy to enhance narrative accessibility. While this approach marked a step towards inclusive media practices, the limitations of current audio description methods became apparent. Artists involved in the project noted that such descriptions often lacked the capacity to convey emotional nuance, spatial atmosphere, or multisensory detail. For example, Mr. Wang and Mr. Su reflected on the inadequacy of standard narration in representing complex sensory environments and advocated for the integration of AI-based systems capable of providing real-time, context-sensitive interpretation. These discussions underscored the broader need for accessible technologies that not only translate visual content into verbal forms but also reconfigure spatial awareness and interactivity. Innovations such as sound-based or tactile indoor navigation systems were envisioned to support orientation and engagement in gallery and museum settings. Enhanced AI functionalities on mobile platforms similarly held potential to empower blind users in accessing digital content with greater autonomy and responsiveness.

The artistic strategies developed through this research catalysed new forms of accessible practice. The participating artists expanded both the conceptual and practical boundaries of contemporary art.

5.4.3 Reframing Disability Through the Lens of Artists' Identities

The artists with visual impairment who participated in this research expressed diverse perspectives on disability, yet all articulated a form of affirmative identity grounded in lived experience. Rather than viewing disability as a deficit, the artists approached it as a neutral or generative state of being, an embodied difference that shaped, but did not define, the creative or social value. Musician Mr. Kong provided a clear articulation of this stance by describing disability as an objective description rather than a pejorative label:

I think it is a word that objectively describes my real state; I don't feel insulted or labelled as a "person with disability". I have my rights. I just see it as an objective description of my condition, like being male or female, tall or short, fat or thin, right? I exist, I do not deliberately avoid it.

(personal communication, October 22, 2022)

This position reflected a form of self-definition rooted in bodily reality, distancing from imposed social stigma. In this view, disability functioned as a descriptive term, not a constraint on agency or potential. The distinction Mr. Kong made resonated with CDS, which rejects medicalised or deficit-based views and instead reclaims disability as a site of identity and political subjectivity. Similarly, non-visual photographer Mr. Jiang expressed an objective resilient approach to disability discourse in daily life. He remarked:

Even in my life, sometimes people may use language that could be offensive, like using terms such as “瞎 (xiā)³”, which carries a stigmatising connotation of blindness. But personally, I don’t get too upset, because sometimes you know the person isn’t being offensive, you know they don’t mean it that way, so you’re not too sensitive. (personal communication, September 30, 2022)

For Mr. Jiang, the affective impact of language depended less on literal phrasing and more on context and intent. He highlighted the polysemous nature of Chinese terms, observing that phrases like “foolish” or “blind” may hold divergent connotations depending on usage. Nonetheless, Mr. Jiang strongly advocated for appropriate disability language in official discourse and media:

Many people do not understand physical disabilities, and if they use language without understanding, it can imply negative psychological hints, which can have a negative impact on the future inclusion and integration of society. So, I believe that official or public information, such as in movies, TV shows, or popular social media platforms, like TikTok, should avoid using obviously biased and discriminatory language. (personal communication, September 30, 2022).

The researcher reflected on interactions with the artists with visual impairment during this project as well as with members of the wider disabled community, such as participants at Sunshine

³ The Chinese term “瞎 (xiā)” is frequently translated as “blind,” but in colloquial use it commonly carries a derogatory meaning, implying ignorance or irrationality.

Workshops in China and volunteers at Blind Low Vision New Zealand. These encounters revealed that the use and interpretation of disability-related language, such as terms like “blind”, “disabled”, often depended heavily on the social and cultural context. Individuals demonstrated varying levels of sensitivity and acceptance towards such language. In informal settings where both parties shared mutual understanding and exhibited low emotional defensiveness, communication tended to be more fluid, with greater openness and emotional ease. However, when one party exhibited heightened sensitivity, due to past experiences, unfamiliarity, or cultural expectations, the interaction could become more constrained, limiting affective reciprocity and mutual trust. This concern aligned with broader critiques in CDS, which address how language participates in the reproduction of marginalising structures and symbolic violence.

Beyond linguistic framing, each participant also articulated a distinct embodied stance towards disability that further challenged deficit-based assumptions. Improvisational dancer Mr. Su placed emphasis on ability and functionality rather than limitation. In line with Crip theory’s challenge to normative body ideals, he viewed non-visual sensory engagement not as compensation but as an enrichment of expressive depth. As a trained psychological counsellor, Mr. Su exhibited heightened interpersonal sensitivity, which informed both his therapeutic and artistic practices. During collaboration, the researcher observed his nuanced affective modulation and tendency towards emotional restraint, traits understood not as signs of vulnerability but as evidence of intentional self-regulation and perceptual attunement.

The researcher resonated with Mr. Su’s approach, which emphasised non-visual sensory engagement as a primary creative mode rather than a compensatory strategy. Mr. Su viewed disability

not as a limitation but as a different mode of bodily perception, centred on touch, proprioception, and affective resonance, that could deepen expressive capacity. Especially during improvisational dance creation, the researcher found alignment with this perspective. In interactive moments, the researcher often closed their eyes spontaneously, entering a meditative state that enhanced sensory resonance. This experience led to the realisation that sight, while regularly presumed advantageous, could interfere with deeper affective connection in embodied encounters.

Installation artist Mr. Wang provided a multidimensional view of disability, arguing that it should be evaluated across individual, societal, and environmental axes. He proposed that disability emerges not only from physiological limitations but from contextually situated interactions between body and structure. Mr. Wang explained that if communities and systems offered sufficient support, an individual might not perceive the condition as disabling. He further advocated for distinguishing between “disability” and “impairment”, noting that conflation of the two was symptomatic of a lingering medicalised model in Chinese policy. Mr. Wang observed: *“The issuance of disability certificates and the classification of disability levels in China are determined by government-recognised hospitals, based on biomedical evaluation criteria”* (personal communication, July 11, 2022).

Though the social model of disability had gained traction in recent years, Mr. Wang noted that concepts central to CDS, such as disability dignity, remained underdeveloped in Chinese discourse and required further educational and policy efforts. Disability dignity, aligned with the rights-based model of disability, affirms that people with disabilities possess inherent worth and equal agency, challenging deficit-based views and advocating for full inclusion, respect, and self-determination across all domains of social life.

Within the CDS framework, these practices can be understood as epistemological interventions that question the normative foundations of aesthetic value and redefine authorship in relational, non-visual terms. In this light, people with disabilities are not simply subjects of inclusion but agents in the co-production of knowledge and cultural transformation (Shildrick, 2020). Through these rearticulations of identity and practice, the artists in this study reconceptualised disability, not as a biomedical deficit nor solely a product of structural barriers, but as a situated, embodied, and sensory difference that emerges through creative and cultural participation. These identity-driven reflections further extend the critique of visual-centric creative hierarchies introduced earlier, offering deeper insight into the first research question (How does the perceptual, social, and cultural construction of creative practice of the artists with visual impairment challenge prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art, and vision impairment in China and New Zealand?).

5.4.4 Braille as Artistic Expression and Aesthetic Medium

A. From Tactile Literacy to Digital Sensory Practices. The rapid uptake of assistive digital tools, including screen-reader software and live audio description, had reshaped how the six collaborating artists accessed information and organised the creative processes. Within the four projects, these technologies functioned as core components of inclusive design. In contrast, Braille, which had historically served as the primary mode of literacy for blind communities, was used almost exclusively as an artistic material rather than a functional tool for learning.

Although several studies continue to describe Braille as a fundamental method of information access among blind communities (Lupetina, 2022; Sheffield et al., 2022), the findings from this study suggest a different trend. During interviews, all six collaborating artists reflected on the declining use

of Braille in their everyday lives. Many noted that they had either never fully learned Braille or had gradually stopped using it after transitioning to screen readers and audio-based tools. For younger participants in particular, mobile phone accessibility features and text-to-speech software had effectively replaced tactile reading. This shift reflects not only a change in preferred technologies but also a generational transformation in how people with visual impairment engage with text, information, and learning.

Braille was developed as a tactile system for reading and writing, enabling people with visual impairment to access text through fingertip perception. However, both reading and writing Braille can be demanding, even for people who previously trained. Accurate reading requires fine tactile discrimination of dot patterns and line spacing, and without regular practice, the dots may blur together, making lines difficult to distinguish. Mr. Wang explained,

Reading Braille is an active reading process, whereas listening is passive. Active learning leaves a deeper trace in memory. Writing Braille is relatively easy, but the real challenge lies in tactile recognition. When faced with a full page of Braille, it is difficult to distinguish the lines without proper guidance. Unlike Chinese characters, where line breaks are visually apparent, Braille lines feel continuous to the touch. Even when I know the orientation, whether horizontal or vertical, I still find it hard to separate one line from another... (personal communication, July 11, 2022)

In addition, English Braille posed a distinct set of challenges when compared to Chinese Braille.

Merleau-Ponty's (2012) concept of bodily intentionality helps explain why the act of reading Braille remains significant. It involves a deliberate movement of the hand towards meaning, engaging

the body in an active perceptual process. In contrast, listening to screen-reader audio requires less bodily effort and offers limited engagement with spatial or proprioceptive awareness.

Participants also highlighted linguistic factors. Mr Jiang recalled his university experience: *“Using screen readers in English sometimes presented difficulties, and I didn’t feel entirely comfortable with them”* (personal communication, September 30, 2022).

Mr. Su added:

Chinese Braille is phonetic; if you know Pinyin (Chinese phonetics), learning Braille in Chinese is not a problem; you have a good foundation. But there are some differences between Braille and Pinyin systems. In Braille, each unit square contains six dots arranged in a 3x2 grid, representing variations of each phonetic symbol. (personal communication, July 11, 2022)

Of the four collaborators with visual impairment in this study, two could no longer read Braille fluently; both Mr. Su and Mr. Wang stated that mobile screen-readers rendered Braille unnecessary in daily life. Mr Jiang admitted: *“To be honest, its usage is not very high”* (personal communication, September 30, 2022).

Mr. Wang concurred: *“I personally do not know Braille. Perhaps only a few percent of blind individuals in China have learned Braille, mainly the individuals who attended special schools”* (personal communication, July 11, 2022). He went on to say, *“One significant challenge is the availability of Braille publications ... the high cost of Braille publications, with the average number of words per page being less than half compared to printed books* (personal communication, July 11, 2022).

In the exhibition context, Braille presented further challenges. The tactile dots were vulnerable to compression and abrasion, which complicated long-term preservation and transport.

For example, to display artists' reflections during post-project exhibitions, the researcher produced Braille cards on thick paper, with Mr. Jiang hand-transcribing each one (see Figure 27). Due to the fragility of the embossing, the cards were stored in a metal box for protection during shipping.

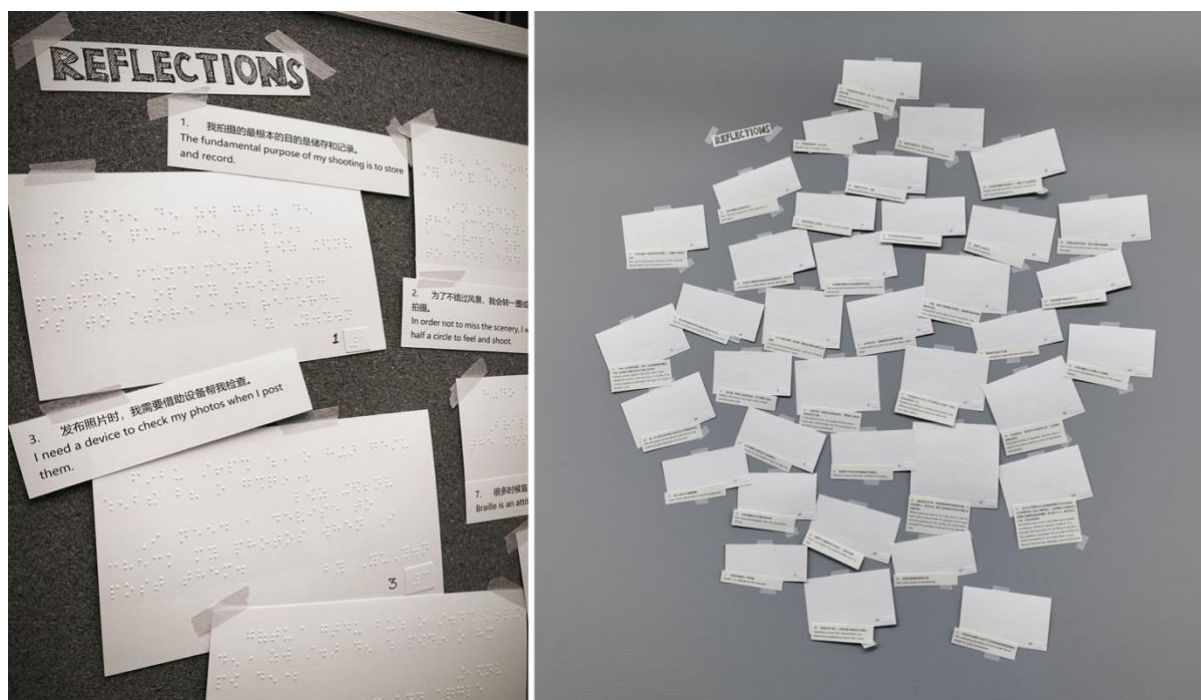


Figure 27 Reflections by the artists and the researcher, presented in printed Chinese and English, alongside handwritten Chinese and English Braille.

In New Zealand, some blind audience members engaged with English Braille captions, but several noted that tactile reading was relatively slow and inefficient in time-sensitive or information-rich environments. The researcher observed that some participants treated Braille as an optional skill rather than a necessity. This response echoed a broader shift not just in technological preferences but also in the perceived cultural status of Braille.

The influence of Braille in contemporary art exhibitions extends beyond sensory variation. This functions not only as a tactile experience but also as a material trace of lived experience that embodies authorship. While prior studies have emphasised Braille's functional role in literacy and accessibility

(Dolphin et al., 2024; Hoskin et al., 2024), this research foregrounds its reinterpretation as an aesthetic and political medium. The presence of Braille invites audiences to slow down and engage more deliberately in the exhibitions, prompting reflection on the cultural and emotional meanings of alternative reading practices. Through such encounters, reading is reimagined as a shared, sensory experience, reconstructed through the viewer's sensory imagination.

B. Reimagining Braille as an Aesthetic and Political Medium. While Braille has become increasingly marginal in daily communication due to the dominance of digital audio tools, its role in disability art practice reveals a renewed cultural and symbolic potential. Within exhibition contexts, Braille no longer functions purely as a literacy tool but as an embodied and politicised medium that prompts critical reflection on tactility, accessibility, and sensory authority.

In disability art exhibitions, Braille acquires symbolic force that challenges the ocular-centric norms of meaning-making. Its tactile form resists the primacy of visual reading and repositions the body, particularly the hand, as an interpretive agent. This sensory reorientation fosters imaginative associations between material texture and conceptual meaning, enabling audiences to engage empathetically with disabled experience. A prominent example is Clarke Reynolds' exhibition *The Power of Touch* at Quantus Gallery in London, which reimagines Braille from a private literacy tool into a public, multisensory aesthetic medium (Scaife, 2023). Reynolds, a blind Braille artist, creates large-scale, colour-coded Braille installations that invite audiences to read through both touch and visual contrast, encouraging a re-evaluation of normative sensory hierarchies. His practice demonstrates that Braille can serve not only as an embodied form of expression but also as a cognitive and symbolic medium. This approach reshapes public understandings of Braille, accessibility, and artistic authorship.

In this research, the installation artist Mr. Wang noted, *“In certain artistic works, there's more utilisation of Braille, especially in installations or themes specifically targeting individuals with visual impairment, as they have a larger audience for Braille”* (personal communication, July 11, 2022).

Rather than serving an instrumental function, Braille becomes a form of sensory intervention that reclaims space for non-visual knowledge and presence, while simultaneously acquiring affective and cultural resonance that offers new layers of meaning and expressive potential within contemporary artistic contexts.

In the Chinese exhibition, artist reflections were transcribed into both Chinese and English Braille. Mr. Jiang supported the researcher in producing the cards, a process that involved technical constraints such as paper flexibility, embossing pressure, and spatial expansion. In New Zealand, the researcher planned to include detailed Braille descriptions for 27 photographic works, but due to spatial constraints, these were reduced to one line per image (Figure 28). While this solution was practical, it inevitably curtailed descriptive richness, highlighting the limitations imposed by exhibition formats. Yet even in this reduced form, Braille offered a distinctive aesthetic. Embossed white-on-white dots challenged the visual uniformity of the space, while tactually, their raised texture created a quiet presence that invited physical interaction. Here, Braille became not just an accessibility aid but an aesthetic strategy that foregrounded embodied difference.



Figure 28 The Braille and English descriptions beside the artwork.

The distinctive dot patterns and specialised display methods offered audiences a nuanced sensory experience that extended beyond the purely visual. Visually, the embossed dots, resembling white-on-white printing, stood out in contrast to the surrounding blank space and conventional black text. Tactually, their finely arranged, raised formations generated subtle, intimate impressions on the fingertips. As such, Braille introduced a novel form of multisensory engagement within the exhibition space.

However, the impact of Braille was not limited to sensory variation. In this exhibition, Braille signified embodied authorship that resisted both the standardisation of print and the fluidity of digital audio. More than a tactile script, it became a material trace of lived experience, inviting audiences to reimagine access as affective presence. This quiet intensity invited audiences to slow down, reach out, and reflect on the cultural and affective weight of alternative modes of reading.

This tension between presence and interpretation was also evident in the audio-visual elements of the exhibitions. In four short documentary films corresponding to the four projects, audio descriptions were created to narrate scenes, movements, and spatial relations. However, as Mr. Wang remarked: *“The visual information you see is rich, while sound is linear. You see multiple threads simultaneously in a shot, but sound can only convey one thing at a time* (personal communication, July 11, 2022).

This observation reveals a fundamental difference in sensory temporality: visual perception often allows for simultaneous processing, whereas auditory information unfolds sequentially. As such, audio description, though valuable, cannot fully replicate the layered simultaneity of visual scenes. This highlights a core limitation of current accessibility practices, which still operate within visual-centric frameworks of representation and overlook the temporal complexity of non-visual engagement.

This limitation became most apparent in the improvisational dance film, where the absence of background music, an intentional decision reached after multiple in-depth discussions between the researcher and the dancer, allowed ambient sound and bodily rhythm to emerge. Both parties agreed that pre-composed tracks might steer audience emotions, restrict interpretive openness, and undermine the authenticity of the dancer’s embodied expression. Within disability art and improvisational performance, foregoing music thus functioned as a critical gesture that challenged the visual-auditory assumption that dance must be accompanied by melody to be meaningful. By removing music, the work returned to the raw interaction among body, space, and environmental sound, prompting audiences to ask whether dance inherently requires music or whether that expectation reflects a cultural bias rooted in normative sensory experience.

Moreover, although audio description and Braille are designed to promote inclusion, both remain shaped by normative visual frameworks. Mainstream audio description often assumes that blind viewers require translation of visual content, rather than recognising their distinct perceptual frameworks. Similarly, Braille's use in art can become symbolic rather than operational, functioning more as a token of access than a site of critical engagement.

Drawing on Paterson's (2017) interpretation of haptic visuality, Braille in exhibitions resists visual dominance, not by transmitting information, but by asserting a tactile presence that reclaims space for embodied memory and multisensory authorship. Rather than functioning as a utilitarian script, Braille becomes a medium of aesthetic resistance, an imprint of presence and refusal to be erased through sensory marginalisation.

Throughout the collaborative process and exhibition design, the researcher recognised a persistent tension in the use of Braille. Most collaborators no longer relied on Braille in daily life, yet several artists still invested it with profound meaning. On one level, Braille opens a renewed cultural and aesthetic space by inviting audiences to read through the body rather than the eye. On another level, artists described it as a marker of educational achievement, linguistic identity, and membership in a transnational community of blind readers, a "shared tactile alphabet" that anchors cultural belonging. For these artists, the embossed dots recall formative struggles for literacy, signal self-determination, and embody a collective history of touch-based knowledge that is not captured by audio technologies.

Positioned between declining practical utility and rising symbolic importance, Braille acquires a layered, paradoxical significance that reveals accessibility as a site of cultural negotiation rather than

a neutral technical fix. Disability-led art practice therefore cannot treat tactile text as a mere aid; it must interrogate the cultural logics, power relations, and epistemic regimes that decide what counts as legible, valuable, and knowable within multisensory art.

The integration of Braille into artistic practice exceeds mere regulatory compliance and functions as an explicit critique of sensory hierarchies: it asks whose perceptual norms are privileged, whose knowledge is legitimised, and whose bodies are centred. No longer a relic of obsolete technology, Braille acts as a political gesture that reclaims marginalised tactile modes of experience and, through its material presence and symbolic charge, asserts the value of embodied, non-visual ways of knowing, feeling, and belonging in art. This expanded interpretation of Braille as an aesthetic and political medium reinforces earlier insights into the artists' redefinition of disability, authorship, and perception, and situates non-visual engagement as central to inclusive artistic practice.

5.5 Shaping Audience Understandings of Culture, Art, and Disability

Artistic practices, in this context, operated as a bridge between the artists' sensory worlds and the audience's interpretive frameworks. Artistic mediums such as non-visual photography, improvisational performance, and interactive installation served as crucial means of connection for both sighted and visually impaired viewers. These sensory-driven forms, grounded in touch, sound, and spatial experience, challenged audiences to perceive and interpret a world beyond visual cues.

Mr. Jiang described non-visual photography as a communicative device that "*connects the art form to its audience*" (personal communication, September 30, 2022). By constructing sensory encounters rooted in touch, sound, rhythm, and spatial engagement, the artworks enabled viewers to access unfamiliar perceptual registers. This bridging did not dissolve difference but, rather,

foregrounded it as a space of mutual encounter. In particular, interactive installation works encouraged audiences to interpret sensory information through personal and cultural memories. For instance, in the installation art, the researcher and the artist incorporated culturally specific elements rooted in Chinese social contexts, particularly the concept of social personas expressed through Chinese characters, such as “good student”, “dutiful child”, or “model worker” (see Section 4.2.2). These symbolic materials were designed to prompt audience members to construct identity narratives through tactile interaction. This conceptual strategy reflected the artists’ desire to merge cultural tradition with embodied sensation, suggesting that perception itself is shaped by historical, linguistic, and social structures.

However, when such culturally situated sensory approaches were exhibited in Western contexts, the results were less predictable. While the artistic intent remained consistent, the meanings audiences attributed to tactile or spatial elements diverged across cultural lines. Drawing on phenomenological perspective, this unpredictability is not merely a result of misinterpretation but an indication that perception is always situated and culturally mediated. Perception does not arise from a neutral, universal sensory apparatus but emerges from within embodied histories and environmental embeddedness.

The researcher found that what was intuitively meaningful for Chinese audiences, such as the symbolic use of calligraphy or the evocation of Daoist spatial metaphors, could be misread in New Zealand. This case study highlighted the risks of cultural misinterpretation within exhibition contexts and demonstrated how artistic meaning is co-constituted by the viewer’s cultural grounding. The

analysis further affirmed the need for more nuanced cross-cultural curatorial practices that account for the phenomenological embeddedness of both creation and reception.

While the artists did not directly participate in the layout of the exhibition space, specific contributors played an active role in shaping its accessibility design. Mr. Wang, for instance, advocated for the inclusion of audio descriptions to convey both static and dynamic imagery. In response, the researcher implemented audio descriptions in the short films and select photographic works, although spatial and resource constraints limited their scope. Ms. Yu proposed the integration of three-dimensional QR codes to assist visitors in navigating the space; while this idea could not be fully realised due to technical limitations, alternative tactile signage and verbal guidance were employed to support non-visual orientation.

These contributions underscored a collective commitment to ensuring the exhibition's accessibility for audiences with a range of sensory needs. More importantly, accessibility was not framed as a matter of regulatory compliance but as a philosophical commitment to co-existence and equity in aesthetic engagement. The suggestions offered by the artists reflected an understanding that access extends beyond physical infrastructure to encompass epistemological and ontological dimensions, raising questions about how knowledge, notions of beauty, and meaning are rendered available to different bodies and modes of perception.

This broader understanding of access was echoed in several exhibition contexts, where both artists and audiences reflected on how physical and sensory infrastructures shape inclusion in practice. Some participants praised Hong Kong venues, such as the Hong Kong Palace Museum, for their accessible design, including tactile floor maps, Braille signage, and multisensory guides (HKPM, 2025;

Paterson, 2017). Mr. Wang noted that these features were not just functional but represented institutional recognition of disabled people's rightful place within cultural spaces. However, the researcher observed that even in contexts with advanced access infrastructure, visual media remained dominant. Aesthetic judgement was still grounded in visual completeness and optical coherence, subtly marginalising alternative sensory modalities. This latent ocularcentrism raises critical questions about what is considered a "complete" exhibition and who defines its evaluative criteria.

The tendency to visually judge disability art is not limited to institutional settings. As Szubielska and Fudali-Czyż (2019) demonstrated, participants who were informed that the artworks were created by people with visual impairment showed significantly higher aesthetic appreciation and subjective understanding. This pattern suggests that awareness of the artist's disability may activate attributional mechanisms that lead to inflated evaluations, potentially as a response to societal stereotypes or the cognitive need to make sense of ambiguous artworks.

This reflects a deep ambivalence in the social reception of disability art: the sensory dimension of artistic engagement intersects with disability, perception becomes entangled with prejudice, normative expectations, and dominant cultural narratives. The artists involved in this study recognised this tension and actively sought to challenge it by creating work that resisted both pity and praise. The goal was not to be valorised as exceptional but to engage viewers in authentic, sometimes uncomfortable, perceptual reorientations.

Against this backdrop, the interactive installations and performances served as platforms for audiences to confront embedded assumptions about perception and disability. Participatory strategies enabled viewers to actively shape the form and meaning of the work, repositioning

audience members from passive spectators to engaged co-creators. Mr. Wang's ongoing *Touchable Space* project at a museum in Shenzhen from 2024 to 2025 exemplifies this dialogic model. Through the creation of a sensory environment that emphasises haptic engagement, the project invites sighted participants to reconsider the dominant role of vision and reflect critically on conventional perceptual norms. Such initiatives represent important steps towards embedding disability aesthetics within the broader cultural landscape.

Although the artists recognised the social model of disability as a valuable foundation, particularly in its emphasis on removing environmental barriers and promoting institutional accountability, it was not without limitations. These limitations were clearly acknowledged during interviews. Several participants noted that while the model had advanced public awareness, it regularly led to superficial adjustments rather than meaningful changes to architectural design, material accessibility, or long-term inclusion strategies. Accessibility infrastructure, for example, remains costly, restricting its implementation in temporary or community-based exhibitions.

More critically, without a corresponding shift in epistemological assumptions, accessibility continues to be treated as a technical addition rather than an integral reconfiguration of artistic and cultural space. The interviews indicated a preference for rights-based frameworks that embed lived experience and cultural participation at their core. Among the alternative perspectives discussed, rights-based and intersectional approaches were regarded as especially promising, as they foreground power relations, lived experience, and collective accountability as essential to achieving meaningful social transformation.

In sum, the artists' practices and reflections not only contested the dominance of vision in artistic production but also exposed the limitations of conventional frameworks for understanding art and disability. Rather than reinforcing therapeutic or compensatory narratives, the multisensory approaches in this research foregrounded creativity as an embodied, situated, and culturally informed process. The findings not only expand current understandings of non-visual art practice but also challenge existing scholarship that continues to interpret disability art through symbolic or therapeutic lenses. By centring lived experience, multisensory authorship, and cultural specificity, this research contributes a relational and epistemologically grounded perspective to the field of disability aesthetics. The final chapter builds on these insights by situating them within broader interdisciplinary debates, highlighting the theoretical, methodological, and social implications of this research for Disability Studies, inclusive art practice, and cross-cultural knowledge production.

Chapter 6: Findings – Audience Perspectives on Disability Art in Cultural, Perceptual and Social Impact

6.1 Overview

This chapter presents a critical discussion of the audience responses to four exhibitions showcasing the multisensory artworks of visually impaired artists. Drawing on two primary sources, audience questionnaires and the researcher's reflexive journals, the analysis explores how disability arts were perceived, interpreted, and experienced by diverse public audiences. In contrast to Chapter 5, which focused on the artists' creative processes, this chapter foregrounds audience perspectives, with particular attention to perceptual modalities, cultural framings, and affective reactions during their engagement with the exhibitions. These observations are further analysed in relation to the artistic intentions and processes that preceded the exhibitions, allowing for an integrated understanding of how audience experience was shaped at the intersection of sensory encounter and creative expression.

The overarching aim of this chapter is to examine how disability arts, when situated within a public exhibition context, contribute to shaping cultural perception, generating affective resonance and promoting socially inclusive artistic discourse. This chapter specifically addresses the following research questions as mentioned in Section 1.2:

- RQ 3: How can the dual perspectives of the participant-researcher, as collaborator, co-developer, and curator, and the artists with visual impairment be integrated into creative practice as research?

- RQ 4: How do the multi-media and multisensory artistic practices of artists with visual impairment shape audience understandings of culture, art, and disability?

A mixed-methods approach was employed to analyse the data. DSA was used to examine the quantitative results of the questionnaires, offering insights into audience demographics and general evaluative trends. RTA was applied to the qualitative responses to explore how audience members described their affective and cognitive engagement with the exhibitions. In addition, IPA was used to analyse the researcher's reflexive journals and field notes, enabling a deeper understanding of the shifting positionalities involved in curating, observing, and interpreting audience experience. This analytical strategy aligns with the transdisciplinary methodological framework of the research, integrating phenomenological, Daoist, and CDS perspectives.

Through multiple rounds of coding, the researcher systematically identified key audience responses reflected in the qualitative data. Initial open coding extracted frequently occurring terms, such as touch, taste, multisensory, hear, and scene, which highlighted participants' engagement with non-visual sensory channels, reflecting a heightened awareness of embodied perception. Second, terms like disorder, physical, loss, normal, ability, and body indicated that the exhibitions' stimulated reflection on disability, access, and inclusion, aligning with the critical stance of Disability Studies. Third, words such as imagination, spiritual, scenario, experience, visceral feeling, emotion, and meditation revealed the audience's affective and imaginative responses, suggesting that the artworks encouraged introspection and deeper affective resonance. These thematic categories were then synthesised into a multidimensional analytical framework, capturing the perceptual, cognitive, and social dimensions of audience meaning-making. Direct audience quotations were incorporated throughout the RTA

process, ensuring that the authenticity and depth of individual voices were preserved within the qualitative interpretation.

These themes were developed through successive cycles of descriptive and interpretative coding, resulting in a set of interrelated core and sub-themes that structure the chapter's analytical framework. Figure 29 visualises this thematic structure of audience responses, which underpins the organisation of the chapter into three major sections. Each section foregrounds a particular thematic focus while recognising that these themes are not discrete but deeply interconnected across cultural, sensory, and curatorial dimensions.

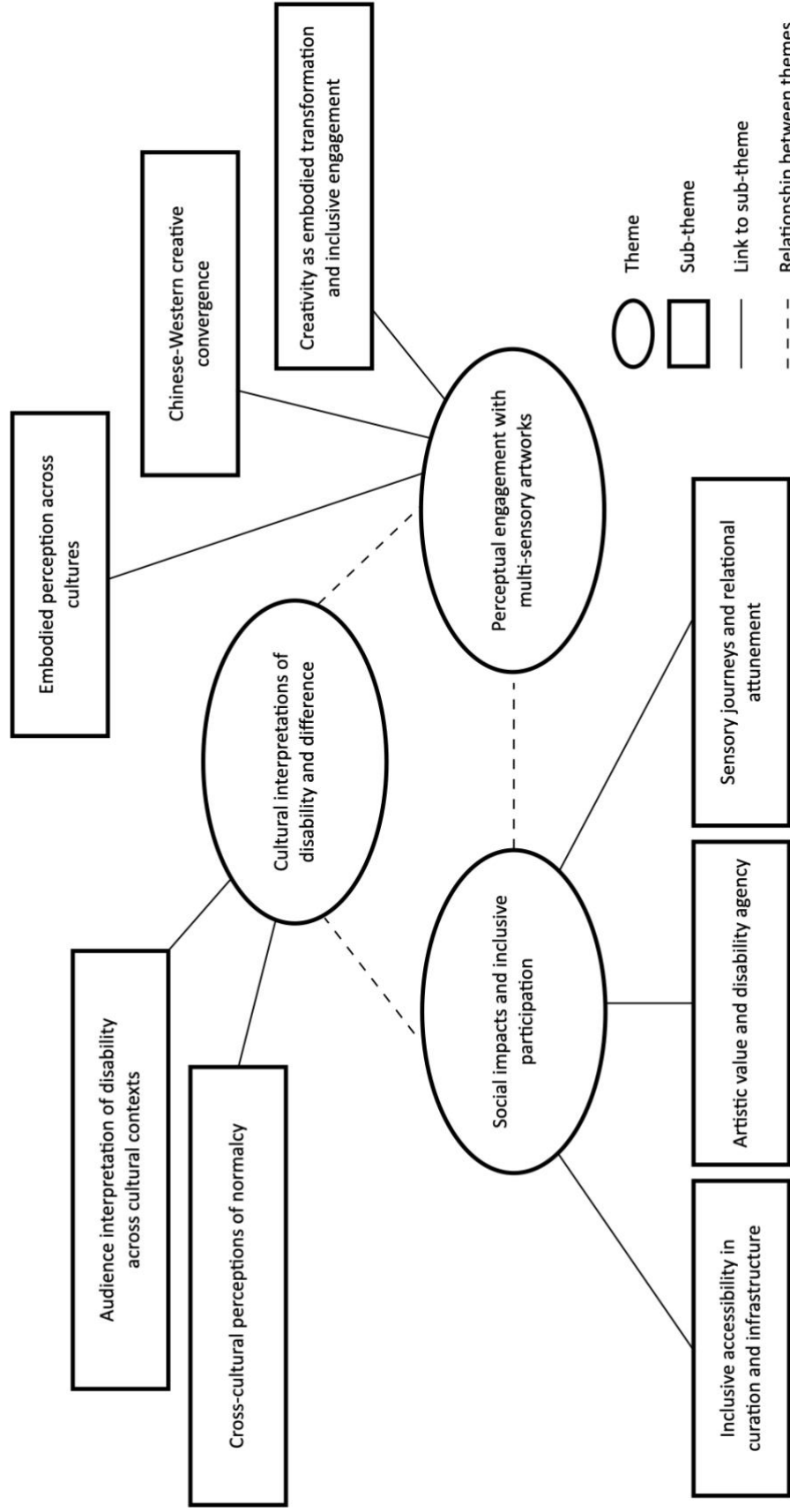


Figure 29 Thematic map derived from audience questionnaire data in the exhibitions.

Rather than treating these themes in isolation, the analysis demonstrates how they intersect and inform one another. Audience perceptions of accessibility, for instance, often reflected deeper cultural assumptions about disability and inclusion, while sensory engagement shaped affective responses and social reflection. The chapter thus presents an integrated reading of audience experience, grounded in multisensory, cross-cultural, and reflexive analysis. To guide the structure of the chapter, the following section presents the three overarching themes and their associated sub-themes that emerged from the analysis.

- Cultural interpretations of disability and difference: examining how audiences in China and Aotearoa New Zealand drew upon distinct cultural logics to interpret disability, inclusion, and artistic recognition.

Sub-themes:

- Audience interpretation of disability across cultural contexts
- Cross-cultural perceptions of normalcy
- Perceptual engagement with multisensory artworks: exploring how audiences encountered non-visual installations through alternative sensory pathways such as touch, sound, spatial movement, and atmospheric immersion.

Sub-themes:

- Embodied perception across cultures
- Chinese-Western creative convergence
- Creativity as embodied transformation and inclusive engagement

- Social impacts and inclusive participation: investigating audience feedback on accessibility services, affective responses, and shifting attitudes as well as reflecting on the researcher's evolving role within the exhibition context.

- Inclusive accessibility in curation and infrastructure
- Artistic value and disability agency
- Sensory journeys and relational attunement

To contextualise the audience responses analysed in this chapter, it is important to briefly summarise the demographic profile of questionnaire participants. Throughout the exhibition process, the researcher transitioned from collaborative art practitioner to curator and on-site facilitator, engaging directly with diverse audience groups, including students, educators, blind and low-vision individuals, and members of the general public from a variety of professional and cultural backgrounds. The researcher's reflexive notes capture this dynamic curatorial process and provide additional insight into how the exhibition space functioned as a site of public engagement, knowledge negotiation, and affective encounter.

Across the four exhibitions held in China and New Zealand, a total of 152 valid audience questionnaires were collected (China: 97; New Zealand: 55). The Chinese exhibition attracted over 300 visitors, with 218 individuals expressing willingness to participate in the questionnaire. Among the respondents, 68% were aged between 18 and 25, and 70% identified as students. Most participants reported no visual impairment, with only two individuals indicating some degree of visual impairment.

In the context of the New Zealand exhibitions, which also attracted more than 300 attendees, the 55 respondents presented a more diverse demographic profile. The age range spanned from under

18 to over 66 years old, and the gender distribution was relatively balanced (41.8% male, 58.2% female). Compared to the Chinese exhibition, a higher proportion of respondents in New Zealand reported having visual impairments, and many were affiliated with Blind Low Vision NZ or disability-related professional and educational sectors.

These demographic patterns, summarised in Figures 30 and 31, provide an essential context for the interpretation of audience perceptions regarding sensory engagement, accessibility services, and conceptual understandings of disability.

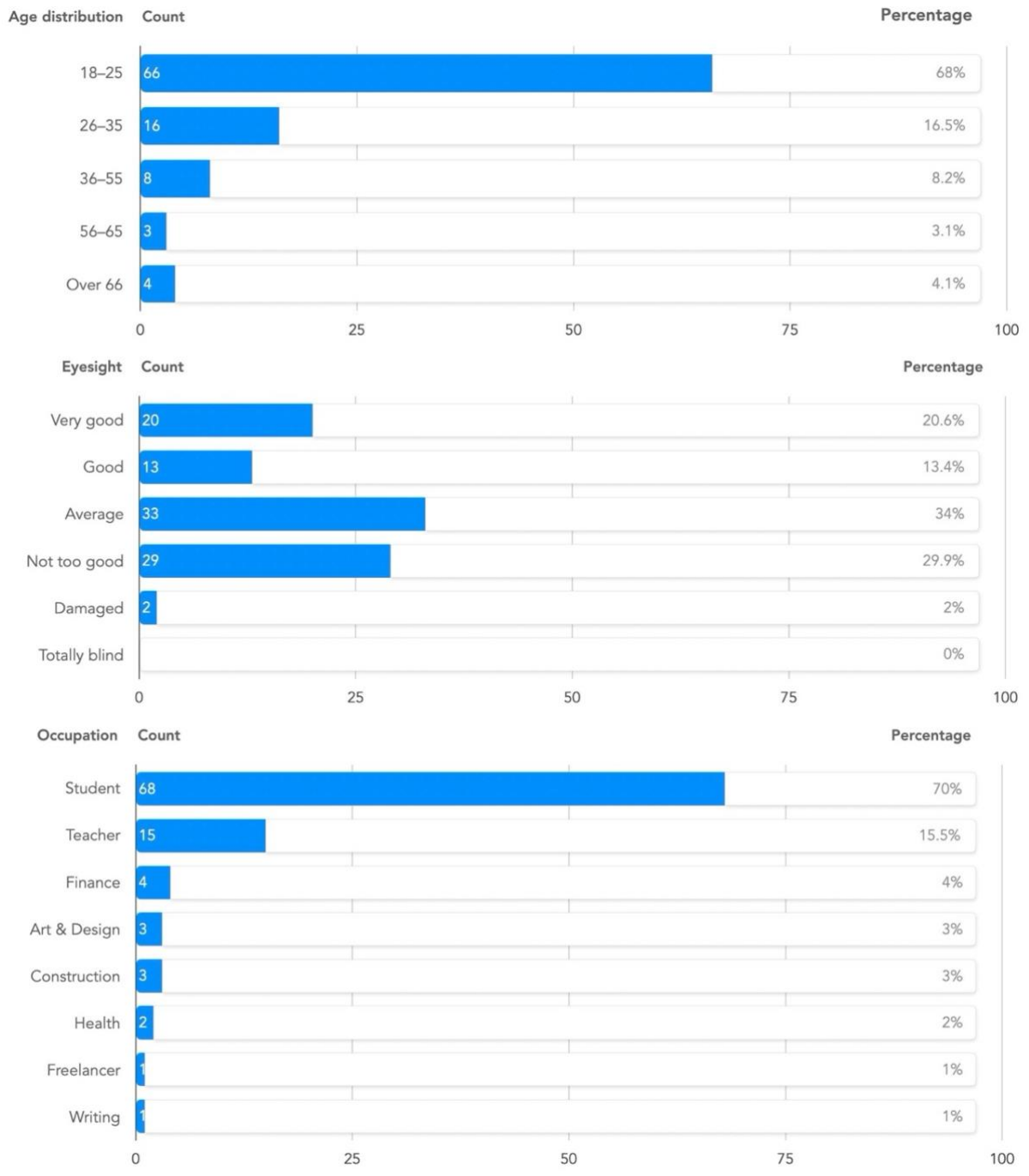


Figure 30 Demographic information of the participants in the Chinese exhibition survey.

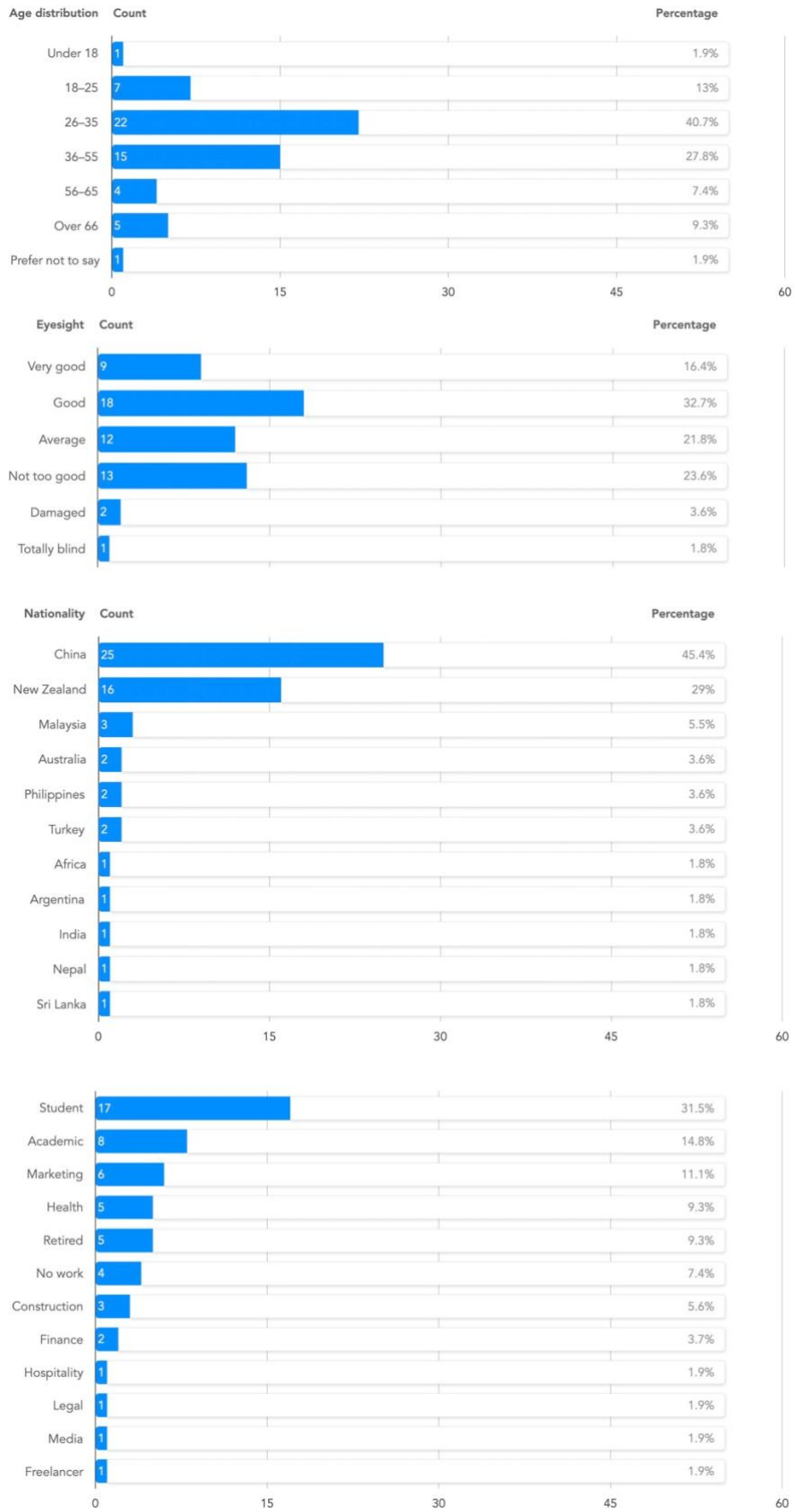


Figure 31 Participants' demographic information in the exhibitions in New Zealand.

6.2 Interpretating Disability Through Cultural Frameworks

This section explores how audiences in China and New Zealand interpreted disability, specifically visual impairment and difference through culturally situated lenses. These interpretations were shaped by diverse social narratives, institutional discourses, and lived experiences that framed bodily variation in context-specific ways. Disability theorists have argued that the meanings ascribed to bodily difference are contingent, circulating through culturally specific narratives, regulatory frameworks, and everyday encounters (Baglieri, 2022; Goodley et al., 2019). These meanings do not exist in isolation but are continually negotiated by individuals and communities through cultural, social, and aesthetic practices.

The current section builds on this understanding by analysing audience responses gathered during the exhibitions, with a focus on how cultural values and normative assumptions shaped their perceptions of disability. The discussion is organised into two interrelated parts, each foregrounding a different aspect of audience interpretation while remaining conceptually connected within the overall analytical framework. As shown in Figure 32, the exhibitions provided culturally situated encounters in which sensory engagement and social imaginaries of disability were continually reconfigured.



Figure 32 Visitors interacting with the artworks during the exhibitions in New Zealand (top) and China (bottom two pictures).

6.2.1 Understanding Disability Through Situated Meaning-making

In recent decades, scholarly approaches to disability have moved beyond binary oppositions, such as medical versus social models, towards more inclusive, pluralistic frameworks that recognise the relational, cultural, and political dimensions of disablement. Contributions from CDS and Crip theory further situate disability as a locus of lived agency, cultural difference, and systemic negotiation (Baglieri, 2022; Goodley et al., 2019). The cross-national exhibition series offered a productive site for

observing how such theoretical developments manifest in everyday interpretive practices. This section shifts the analytical lens to audience reception, drawing on coded questionnaire data and direct quotations to explore how spectators interpreted and negotiated meaning when encountering multisensory artworks created by artists with visual impairment.

Analysis draws on 152 completed questionnaires and subsequent conversational interviews conducted in China and New Zealand. Audience interpretations are examined across four comparative dimensions: (1) conceptual frameworks, (2) self-reported experience and identity, (3) social contact and visibility, and (4) aesthetic reframings of capacity. Rather than evaluating spectator comments against an external standard of correctness, the section traces the ways in which visitors assembled, revised, or resisted competing narratives of disability across the two cultural contexts.

A. Cultural Divergence in Disability Frameworks. Across both cultural contexts, many audience members initially approached disability through a biomedical lens. In the Chinese exhibition, 52.6% of respondents interpreted disability as a form of bodily defect, such as *“when a certain organ fails to function”* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). Similarly, more than half of the New Zealand audience (51.9%) framed disability in terms of diminished capacity or reduced functionality, describing it as *“an inherent weakness”* or *“the inability to carry out daily activities due to impairment”* (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024). Audience interpretations of disability collected during the New Zealand exhibition are summarised in Table 2, offering a comparative perspective alongside responses from the Chinese exhibition, shown in Table 3.

Table 2 *Categorisation of audience interpretations of disability – New Zealand exhibitions*

Category	Description	No. of Responses	% (n = 55)	Examples
Deficit-based/ Medical model	Disability as a loss, impairment, or inability to function “normally”	26	51%	Loss of some certain functions of the body; unable to do what a normal person can do; lack of function of body organs.
Social model/ Structural framing	Disability as a product of environmental or societal barriers	5	9.8%	A person for whom the social world is not well made; anything that presents obstacles to participating in society.
Support-oriented	Emphasis on needing help or support in daily life	3	5.9%	People who need help or support in daily life; not able to access.
Affirmative/ Diversity Model	Disability as diverse ability or difference; reimagining capability	4	7.8%	Creativity with different competencies; I prefer to think of diverse abilities; use different skills to get around.
Critical/ rejection of label	Rejection of the term or critique of imposed categories	3	5.9%	I do not accept the term disability; what label do you have.
Ambiguous/ unclear/ personal framing	Ambiguous, personal, or unclear statements not easily classified	5	9.8%	Depends on people’s preference; about the attitude of value.
Mixed/ complex interpretations	Responses that contain multiple framings (e.g., both deficit and social critique)	5	9.8%	I don’t like to regard myself as having a disability; people with disability are more powerful.

Table 3 *Categorisation of audience interpretations of disability – Chinese exhibition*

Category	Description	No. of Responses	% (n = 97)	Examples
Medical/impairment-based interpretation	Disability as physical, sensory, or psychological defect or dysfunction, often referencing bodily impairment or abnormality	51	52.6	Physical or mental disability; bodily defect; dysfunction; disorder.
Functional limitation	Inability to perform daily or normal tasks, lack of self-care, or inconvenience in life	14	14.4	Inconvenience in life; can't live like a normal person; obstacles to survival.
Social mode/ rights-based	Disability understood as the result of social or environmental barriers or inequality	3	3.1	Not enjoying rights others are born with; different kind of life.
Philosophical/ metaphorical	Poetic, metaphorical, or spiritual reflections on disability	5	5.2	Close a window, but may be a clearer path to the heart; the soul is free.
Personal reflection/ ambiguous	Subjective interpretations, self-discovery, or denial/uncertainty	7	7.2	Discover oneself; denial of self.
Deficit-based interpretations	Descriptions implying inferiority, ignorance, or derogatory connotations	5	5.2	Be ignorant of; blockhead; abnormal.
None	No response	2	2.1	None; unknown

This persistent framing reflects what Zaks (2024) has described as the enduring tragedy model of disability (mentioned in Section 2.2.1), one that naturalises bodily variation as personal misfortune and obscures the broader social, cultural, and political dynamics that shape disablement. Here, disablement refers not simply to an individual condition but to a socially constructed process in which systemic barriers and normative assumptions restrict participation and define certain bodies as deficient (Catala et al., 2021). These narratives of the audiences reproduce a hierarchical normalcy in which disabled bodies are marked primarily by lack or limitation.

However, both sets of responses revealed conceptual movement. In China, a subset of visitors began to adopt more socially attuned interpretations, emphasising that *“the biggest problem is society’s unwillingness to make more space”* and that *“disability is not about impairment but about social exclusion”* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). In New Zealand, several participants explicitly rejected deficit-oriented language, proposing instead that disability arises *“when someone’s abilities are challenged by default arrangements”* or that *“creative expression with different competencies”* should be recognised as valid and valuable (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024). Such perspectives resonate with CDS, which frames disability not as a stable biomedical fact but as a socio-political construct mediated by access, recognition, and power (Goodley et al., 2018).

Despite these progressive reframings, the trajectory of conceptual shift differed across the two contexts. In the Chinese exhibition, changes in perception were frequently gradual, with audience members moving from medicalised definitions to more ability-focused interpretations before acknowledging structural dimensions. This pattern reflects the limited public visibility of disability

rights discourse in China and the continued influence of familial and state-centred care ideologies. By contrast, in the New Zealand exhibitions, particularly among participants with prior exposure to inclusive education or disability services, audiences more readily embraced social and relational understandings, although biomedical residues remained visible.

These findings support but also complicate Hadley's (2020) assertion that disability art can crack open dominant social imagination. The artworks presented in this research clearly enabled many viewers to reconsider taken-for-granted assumptions about disability. Yet the degree and direction of that reconsideration were shaped by national histories, linguistic framings, and the broader cultural salience of disability understanding. Rather than assuming a universal impact of disability art, it is more productive to analyse how interpretive shifts are embedded within culturally specific regimes of meaning-making and social expectation.

B. Identity as Temporary and Situated. Audience reflections on personal experience revealed notable contrasts in how disability is internalised and narrated across the two cultural contexts. In the Chinese exhibition, a majority of participants (over 65%) reported having encountered temporary or situational disabling conditions, such as post-injury immobility, severe visual impairment, or affective disorientation during the COVID-19 lockdown. One audience member reflected, *"During the pandemic in 2020, I was at the lowest point in my life... I had serious tendencies toward depression"* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). Another commented, *"When I go out without my glasses, I experience something similar"* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). These statements indicate an emerging recognition that disability may be fluid, episodic, and shaped by broader circumstances rather than permanent biomedical states.

A small subset of Chinese participants expressed a more reflective or philosophical perspective, framing disability as a source of affective or existential insight. Comments such as *“closing one window may bring clearer light into the heart”* and *“a different kind of gift, a different kind of life”* suggest a reevaluation of disability as a site of meaning-making rather than mere lack. Such articulations resonate with Crip theory’s interest in reclaiming non-normative embodiment as a space of creativity and redefinition (Abrams & Abes, 2021).

Another respondent observed that *“visual impairment does not impede the creation of art; instead, it enables sighted audiences to engage with unfamiliar sensory perspectives, while the artistic concept remains intelligible and inclusive”* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). This comment points to an emerging awareness of perceptual diversity and multisensory aesthetics, though it stops short of a deeper structural critique. Overall, these insights remained relatively isolated, and only a few audience members explicitly acknowledged disability as a condition shaped by environmental barriers or systemic exclusion. This suggests that, while artistic interventions may open new affective and sensory pathways, broader public engagement with the political and structural dimensions of disablement in the Chinese context remains limited.

By contrast, audiences at the New Zealand exhibitions included a higher proportion of blind or low-vision participants (29%), largely due to targeted outreach to the local blind low vision community. One contributing factor was the choice of the Meteor Theatre, whose central location and convenient public transport access made it easier for community members to attend. This overrepresentation was considered in the analysis by interpreting the responses in light of participants’ lived experience of vision impairment and avoiding direct statistical comparison with the Chinese

sample, where only two respondents (approximately 2%) reported having significant vision impairment. Though some acknowledged restrictions, such as the inability to drive, the blind community emphasised retained capacities and challenged externally imposed definitions. One participant from Blind Low Vision noted, *“Legally I am disabled, but I can still do many of the things I used to do before my eyesight declined,”* while another asserted, *“I don’t like to consider myself disabled ... it’s just that one of my faculties doesn’t work so well anymore”* (Audience responses, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024). These statements echo Crip theory’s critique of “compulsory able-bodiedness”, highlighting the tension between legal categorisation and embodied self-perception (Mery Karlsson & Rydström, 2023, p. 397). Such resistance underscores how identity is not passively received but actively negotiated, shaped by sociocultural narratives, institutional frameworks, and the desire to assert autonomy over one’s lived experience.

Moreover, a long-term volunteer expressed concern over the cumulative effects of stigma and identity denial: *“I have seen too many people with disabilities who were hurt in their youth, by their families, by society, and by the denial of their identities”* (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024). This observation reinforces the idea that identity formation is not a purely individual process but one shaped through sustained sociocultural conditions and interpersonal dynamics.

Taken together, these findings reveal that while Chinese audiences tend to locate disability within personal or psychological boundaries, frequently drawing on metaphors of hardship or inner struggle, New Zealand participants, particularly those with lived experience, were more likely to assert autonomy in defining their identity and reject externally imposed narratives. This contrast underscores the contextual contingency of disability subjectivities and affirms the need to consider

how policy environments, cultural scripts, and collective memory shape the lived meanings of impairment.

C. Social Contact and Public Visibility. Survey data revealed marked differences in everyday contact with disability. In the exhibition in China, fewer than one-third of respondents (approximately 30 %) reported knowing people with disabilities and many added that they “rarely encounter the people with disability” in public settings. By contrast, over one-half (about 53%) of the viewers in New Zealand’s exhibitions reported personal ties—friends, colleagues, or family members with visual impairment. This may partly reflect the higher proportion of attendees who themselves had direct experience of visual impairment as well as New Zealand’s longer history of community integration and anti-discrimination initiatives. In contrast, in contemporary China, disability awareness remains limited, and opportunities for community-level participation are comparatively low, reducing routine contact between disabled and non-disabled citizens.

Installation artist Mr. Wang observed that some Chinese families “*keep blind relatives at home for safety*” (personal communication, July 11, 2022). While such actions may stem from protective intentions, they inadvertently contribute to spatial and social exclusion. From a phenomenological perspective, this practice deprives individuals with visual impairment of opportunities for intersubjective engagement and embodied world-making. In Merleau-Ponty’s perspective (2012), perception is not passive reception but a dynamic mode of being-in-the-world, a relational process through which meaning is constituted via sensory and bodily interaction. By limiting the presence of people with disability in public life, such familial strategies interrupt this process and constrain the possibilities for mutual recognition and shared experience.

From a Daoist lens, this form of seclusion also challenges the reciprocal harmony between individuals and the environments. Daoist philosophy conceives life not as a series of fixed states but as an ongoing flow of responsive relations. Disability, when understood through this lens, is not a deficiency to be hidden but a difference to be integrated within the natural rhythms of social life. The act of keeping someone “safe” by removing them from public space inadvertently creates imbalance, not only isolating the individual but also denying the wider community the transformative potential of engaging with embodied difference.

D. Aesthetic encounter and capacity revaluation. Direct engagement with multisensory artworks frequently unsettled deficit-oriented assumptions. A Chinese visitor who had initially defined disability as “loss of functions” concluded that “*visual impairment does not impede artistic creation; it lets sighted people feel in new ways*” (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). A peer echoed this sentiment, remarking that the exhibition “*moved me deeply, and I would like to be involved*” (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022).

Such comments indicate a shift away from deficit-oriented towards more relational and appreciative imaginaries as spectators engaged with the tactile, auditory, and spatial strategies devised by the artists. Rather than viewing disability through a biomedical or social lens, these responses reflect a growing attunement to the CDS framework, which foregrounds disability as a social, cultural, and political construct. In this view, multisensory artistic encounters do not merely compensate for sensory loss but actively reconfigure normative understandings of perception, ability, and creativity, challenging dominant cultural assumptions about bodily norms and competence, and enabling more inclusive modes of aesthetic appreciation.

The audiences in New Zealand described a different but complementary transformation. An art therapist recounted, *“Mixed emotions of gratitude, awe, wonder, and curiosity ... human senses can be stretched”* (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024), while a blind attendee stressed continuing agency: *“Legally I am disabled, but I can still do many of the things I used to do before my eyesight declined.”* These reflections reveal how artistic engagement can cultivate alternative and affective forms of understanding, grounded in sensory variation and experiential differences. Rather than interpreting disability as “compensating for loss”, multisensory interaction reframes disability as a site or space of creative potential and embodied knowledge. When artistic spaces support such encounters, they enable audiences to re-interpretate disability, not as a fixed deficit but as a mode of difference with its own aesthetic and cognitive value.

However, the transformative reach of these encounters remains uneven. While some Chinese visitors began to shift their perceptions, only a small number explicitly recognised the role of structural barriers in shaping disablement. For instance, one Chinese participant noted:

Visual impairment does not hinder artistic performance; it allows people with normal vision to experience different sensations, with a complete absence of barriers in thinking. The biggest obstacle for people now is the unwillingness to give more space to those with limitations (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022).

Such responses were rare, however, and most focused on personal effort rather than institutional constraints. Similarly, several New Zealand respondents continued to describe disability primarily as an inconvenience, referencing functional restrictions, like the inability to drive. These patterns underscore that while art can prompt affective and conceptual reorientation, it remains

insufficient to address the deeper structural inequalities and cultural norms that sustain the marginalisation of people with disability. Lasting change requires not only shifts in perception but also sustained policy reform and inclusive social infrastructure. Audience reflections on aesthetic engagement and disability as creative capacity lay the groundwork for further analysis. The next section examines how normative expectations of “normalcy” are constructed and challenged across cultural contexts.

6.2.2 Normalcy and Difference in Comparative Cultural Contexts

Building on the previous section’s discussion of aesthetic encounter and identity negotiation, this part considers how such engagements challenge the very notion of normalcy, revealing divergent yet intersecting cultural imaginaries across China and New Zealand.

While audiences in both China and New Zealand exhibited evolving understandings of disability through the exhibitions, the character and depth of these transformations appeared to vary across cultural contexts. In some Chinese responses, references to social harmony, familial duty, and collective well-being suggested interpretive tendencies that may align with Daoist-influenced cultural values. Meanwhile, several New Zealand participants, including 16 individuals who were visually impaired (29% of the New Zealand respondents), emphasised personal agency or community inclusion, resonating with both Western liberal ideals and Māori relational principles. While these patterns are not conclusive, they gesture towards broader cultural orientations that potentially shape how disability, artistic value, and participation are perceived. These interpretive insights, drawn from audience engagement with the artworks, offer points of departure for understanding how inclusion is operationalised in different national contexts.

A. Challenging the Understanding of Normalcy. During the exhibition process, particularly through interactions with the blind community in New Zealand, the researcher observed that many participants, especially the people who were totally blind, continued to rely on external assistance and remained accustomed to waiting for help. This reliance reflected practical considerations, such as wayfinding in unfamiliar environments, even within contexts designed to support accessibility. Rather than viewing such interactions as indicators of deficit, the exhibition sought to expand the possibilities for participation by positioning people with visual impairment not only as recipients of access provisions but as active contributors to cultural expression and artistic discourse.

The creative processes developed by artists with visual impairment, alongside the exhibition design, were informed by Crip theory, which critiques dominant interpretations of “normalcy” and interrogates whose bodies and minds are considered standard. The exhibitions invited audiences to re-examine what it means to be “normal”. As one New Zealand audience member noted, *“The people with disabilities cannot live like normal people, but people with disability are more powerful”* (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024). Another viewer added, *“Being damaged in this way or that shouldn’t diminish a person’s ability to participate in society”* (Audience response, GAPA Exhibition, 2024). These reflections highlight a shift from viewing disability as a limitation to recognising its generative potential.

During the Chinese exhibition, one viewer remarked, *“Everyone has an imperfect side”* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022), a statement that blurred the binary between people with and without disabilities. Rather than positioning disability as exceptional, the comment acknowledged imperfection as a shared human condition, echoing Daoist understandings of balance

through imperfection (Hansen, 2024), and thus challenging rigid notions of bodily ideal. Similarly, a New Zealand visitor with visual impairment stated, *“I don’t like to regard myself as having a disability. I’ve just got eyes that don’t work too well anymore ... I’m still able to do what I used to do before my eyes went bad, but I can’t drive anymore”* (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024). This sentiment reflected a perception of ability as spectrum-based rather than binary, a view that aligns with phenomenological accounts of bodily variability as central to human experience.

Such reflections contest normative dichotomies between “normal” and “abnormal”, advocating instead for an understanding of bodily diversity as both natural and valuable. CDS and Crip theory, as discussed in Section 2.2.2, offer a critical framework that locates disability not as an individual pathology but as a product of social and cultural norms. Crip theory challenges these normative assumptions by foregrounding the subjectivity and agency of individuals with disabilities. It promotes disability pride by asserting that the lived experience of one’s own body and capacities plays a central role in constructing the meaning of “normalcy” (Mery Karlsson & Rydström, 2023).

These insights were further embodied in the collaborative art projects, where non-visual sensory modalities played a central role. In rejecting prescriptive visual standards, the artists challenged the ocular-centric logic that governs much of artistic evaluation. At the intersection of disability and art, Crip theory critiqued standardised aesthetic frameworks and prescriptive creative processes, proposing instead a pluralistic and inclusive interpretation of normalcy. This perspective valued diverse embodiments and recognised the multiple intersecting identities that inform artistic practice. Within the blind community, for instance, each individual brought forth distinct experiences shaped by cultural, sensory, and personal contexts.

Interview data revealed that many artists with visual impairment did not regard physical conditions as barriers to creativity. Instead, each artist described the adopted methods as natural and intuitive ways of engaging with artistic materials. This perspective directly challenges normative assumptions that equate creativity with visual proficiency and reflects the ethos of Crip theory, which affirms non-normative embodiments as generative rather than deficient (Levy & Young, 2020). As demonstrated by Sitter et al. (2025), artists with disability employ alternative sensory modalities as aesthetic strategies, while Garland-Thomson (2011) framed such practices as a revaluation of embodied difference. In the context of non-visual photography, for instance, the artistic value of a work was not grounded in visual composition but emerged through multisensory processes such as tactile exploration, spatial memory, and auditory resonance. These practices subverted the ocular-centric tradition that privileges the eye as the primary channel of aesthetic legitimacy, advocating instead for a pluralistic understanding of artistic experience grounded in embodied perception.

Yet the exhibitions exposed how deeply ocularcentrism is engrained in public consciousness. Multisensory scores, tactile stations, and audio-described films invited participants to “listen with the skin”, yet many responses still defaulted to the axiom that seeing guarantees knowing. From a CDS perspective, this confirms that perception is culturally stratified rather than neutral: hierarchies of the senses normalise vision as the primary conduit of truth. Sugiera’s (2002) work on cognitive prototypes helps explain the persistence of these habits: spectators filter unfamiliar stimuli through entrenched visual schemas stored in long-term memory, thereby re-inscribing a visual order even when non-visual cues are foregrounded. The exhibitions undeniably unsettled that order, with several visitors reported

discovering “alternative ways of sensing”, but the partial character of the shift reveals how powerfully those prototypes circumscribe interpretation.

Taken together, the works did more than diversify gallery formats; they intervened in cultural stories about disability, testing the limits of a vision-dominated aesthetic order and widening the imaginative bandwidth of “normalcy”. Their successes, however, map the terrain still to be contested. Artistic provocation can loosen the grip of visual supremacy, but without concurrent shifts in policy, education, and everyday design, the cognitive and social architecture that privileges sight will continue to regenerate itself.

B. Accessibility service in different contexts. Globally, the majority of art consumption continues to be structured around visual engagement, thereby creating significant barriers for over 22 million people with visual impairment (Cavazos Quero et al., 2021). While increasing numbers of galleries and museums have begun implementing accessibility features, including navigation technologies (Asakawa et al., 2019; Li et al., 2022), audio description (Eardley et al., 2017; Hutchinson & Eardley, 2019), tactile graphics, and virtual tours, these remain confined to a limited set of institutions. Moreover, feedback from blind and visually impaired communities regarding these services is still underrepresented (Li et al., 2023). From a CDS perspective, this gap underscores a broader issue: accessibility should not be reduced to technical solutions but should be understood as a challenge to normative sensory hierarchies and entrenched cultural values.

While such feedback reveals frustrations, it also reflects growing public awareness. Several Chinese institutions, such as the Hong Kong Palace Museum, have begun experimenting with inclusive

design features like tactile maps and Braille signage (HKPM, 2025). These interventions, though limited in scope, signal an emergent commitment to inclusive culture-making.

In New Zealand, audience responses generally indicated a higher baseline of accessibility provisions yet highlighted areas still in need of improvement. Concerns ranged from infrastructure to safety: *“Some footpaths are really dangerous, just beside the road”* (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024). Another noted, *“Hamilton in particular, I mean we have tactile yellow dots all over the place to help us identify safe places to cross the roads and stuff like that”* (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024).

Regarding technology, one viewer observed the limits of mainstream tools:

There is some technology that blind people can't use, and a lot of that has to do with cell phones or computers. But each of us has a volunteer assistant like Jackie to me. They help us to make sure some tools are safe, especially for us to create. (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024)

Volunteer support emerged as a critical resource in the New Zealand context, where people who are legally blind typically receive daily assistance from trained volunteers. While this infrastructure reflects institutional commitment to inclusion, CDS cautions that such support structures, if not accompanied by empowerment and autonomy, may reinforce dependence and obscure structural inequalities.

Positive attitudes towards technology were also evident. One congenitally blind participant expressed appreciation for AI (artificial intelligence), noting its value in facilitating creative production. This aligns with the researcher's collaborative projects, where AI enhanced access to research

materials and supported non-visual art-making. Yet, from a CDS standpoint, it remains essential to ensure that technological assistance does not become a proxy for genuine structural transformation.

New Zealand's policy environment reflects further support through disability allowances that offset living expenses related to impairment. These include weekly payments for transport, healthcare, and other needs (New Zealand Government, n.d.). Although commendable, such financial mechanisms risk positioning disability within a welfare model unless paired with a broader reevaluation of disabled agency and public space design.

In the Chinese context, the audiences placed greater emphasis on the need for inclusive design and representation. One participant stated: *"China has a large number of people with disabilities, and in future designs, more consideration should be given to the lives and designs of these people"* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). This sentiment gestures towards participatory design practices. In the non-visual photography project presented during the exhibition, a designer who cannot hear from the Sunshine Workshop participated in the full design process for the products, shifting away from tokenistic involvement towards genuine co-creation. Audience members recognised that design for people with disabilities should address not only functional needs but the overall quality of life as well. While such grassroots innovation reveals promising bottom-up agency, without sustained institutional reform and policy restructuring, these efforts risk remaining isolated experiments rather than catalysing systemic transformation.

In New Zealand, comments frequently addressed the role of education and public awareness. One viewer remarked: *"There can be improvements in terms of social accessible and educational support"* (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024), while another reflected: *"It gives*

people a better understanding of these lives”. This underscores the potential of art to foster empathy and deeper understanding, with meaningful implications for psychological well-being and therapeutic applications. This reflection reinforced the educational role of the exhibition, highlighting not only the pedagogical value embedded within the artworks but suggesting that such experiences may contribute to reducing prejudice and cultivating a more informed and inclusive societal perspective.

Both Chinese and New Zealand audiences envisioned more inclusive futures, though with different emphases: the former called for infrastructural reform and participatory design, while the latter highlighted ongoing public education and support. These contrasting yet complementary approaches underscore a key tenet of CDS: that disability should not be seen as a deficit to be managed, but as a form of embodied knowledge that can reshape the built and cultural environment. Rather than treating inclusion as a technical goal, CDS reframes accessibility as a dynamic, relational practice grounded in interdependence and justice (Goodley et al., 2018). From this perspective, the insights shared by audiences and artists with disability alike reveal not only unmet needs but also untapped capacities, challenging able-bodied norms, unsettling institutional design assumptions, and pointing towards more pluralistic, co-created futures.

The researcher, through multisensory collaboration with artists with visual impairment across both contexts, came to understand that accessibility should move beyond a checklist of provisions. From both a phenomenological and Daoist standpoint, true access arises through relational attunement, not only between bodies and space but among cultural assumptions, design practices, and ways of knowing. Accessibility, then, should be seen as a dynamic and continuous negotiation, one grounded in justice, interdependence, and the celebration of difference. CDS is a further reminder

that disability is not simply an individual experience to be “accepted” but, rather, a relational field continually shaped and negotiated by political, cultural, and social norms (Goodley et al., 2018). This theoretical lens prompted the researcher to reflect on their own knowledge structures, particularly as a sighted individual trained in visual design, raising critical questions such as: What constitutes “artistic ability”? Who possesses “authorship”? And how should the “autonomy” of creative practice be interpreted?

These questions were not abstract philosophical musings but actively negotiated by the participating artists with visual impairment throughout the collaborative process. Several artists emphasised that their creative methods, shaped by tactile, auditory, and kinaesthetic cues, should not be regarded as compensatory but as fully legitimate artistic languages. For instance, one artist described how listening to environmental soundscapes allowed for emotional resonance and compositional decision-making, while another highlighted how muscle memory and touch guided their sense of spatial rhythm. Rather than aspiring to visual norms, participants framed their practices as autonomous expressions rooted in lived sensory difference. For these artists, authorship was not defined by control over form but by their ability to attune, adapt, and co-create meaning through embodied presence. These accounts reflect CDS’s emphasis on reclaiming disabled narratives not as adaptations to loss but as sites of epistemic resistance and creative autonomy.

6.3 Embodied Perceptual and Audience Engagement

This section presents key findings from the multisensory exhibitions held in China and New Zealand, focusing on how embodied perception operates within disability art practice and reception. Rather than treating the senses as discrete input channels, the analysis explores how bodily

experience, cultural context, and spatial design together shape the ways audiences engage with non-visual artworks. Drawing on concepts from Daoist philosophy, such as wu-wei, qi, and the balance of yin and yang, and phenomenological understandings of embodied presence, the discussion unfolds across three interconnected dimensions. The first examines how affective and intuitive responses vary across cultural settings. The second considers how sensory interactions and spatial elements foster immersive experiences and relational place-making. The third explores how audiences responded to the sensory perspectives of artists with visual impairment and reflected on their own role as participants. Together, these findings reveal how disability art challenges ocular-centric assumptions and invites alternative, culturally embedded ways of sensing, understanding, and making meaning through the body.

6.3.1 Affective and Intuitive Responses Across Cultures

Audience feedback collected from the Chinese exhibition revealed a rich spectrum of non-visual sensory experiences, challenging the assumption that visual cues are central to aesthetic engagement. Among 97 valid responses, only two respondents (approximately 2%) reported significant visual impairment, a factor that inevitably shaped both the sensory modalities they identified and the extent to which these results can be compared with the New Zealand data. When asked to identify the sensory modalities through which the audience perceived the exhibition, 95.9% still referenced visual input. However, when excluding visual impressions, instinctive or affective responses, such as “visceral feeling” or “intuition”, emerged as the most commonly cited mode (63.9%). These findings indicate a perceptual reorientation towards embodied, non-visual engagement, shaped in part by the curatorial strategies employed. By contrast, in the New Zealand

exhibitions 29% of participants had lived experience of blindness or low vision, yet only two mentioned “feeling” or affective intuition in their responses, suggesting divergent cultural orientations towards embodied perception. The summary of these preferences is presented in Figure 33 and Figure 34.

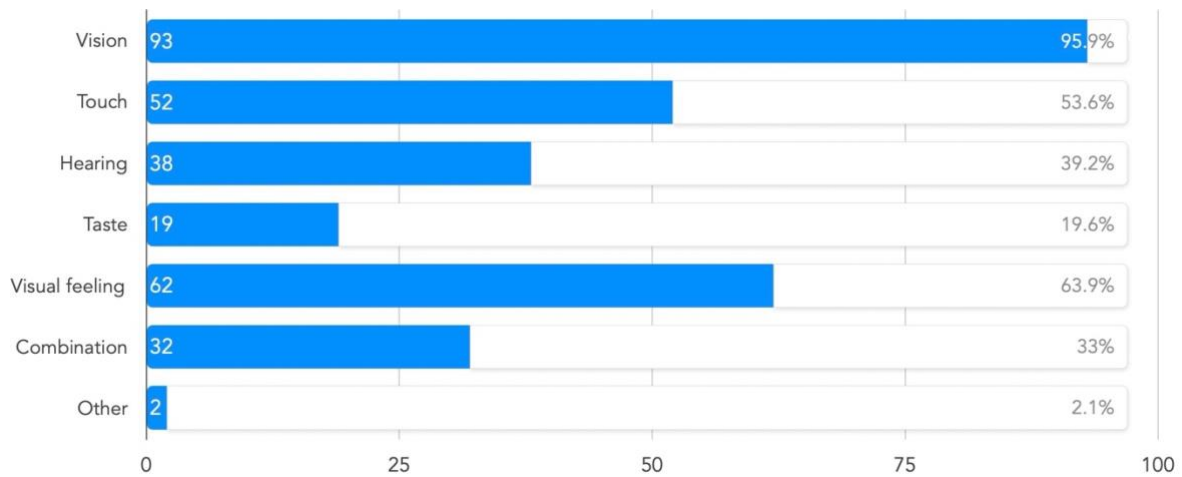


Figure 33 Sensory modality preferences reported by audience members during the Chinese exhibition.

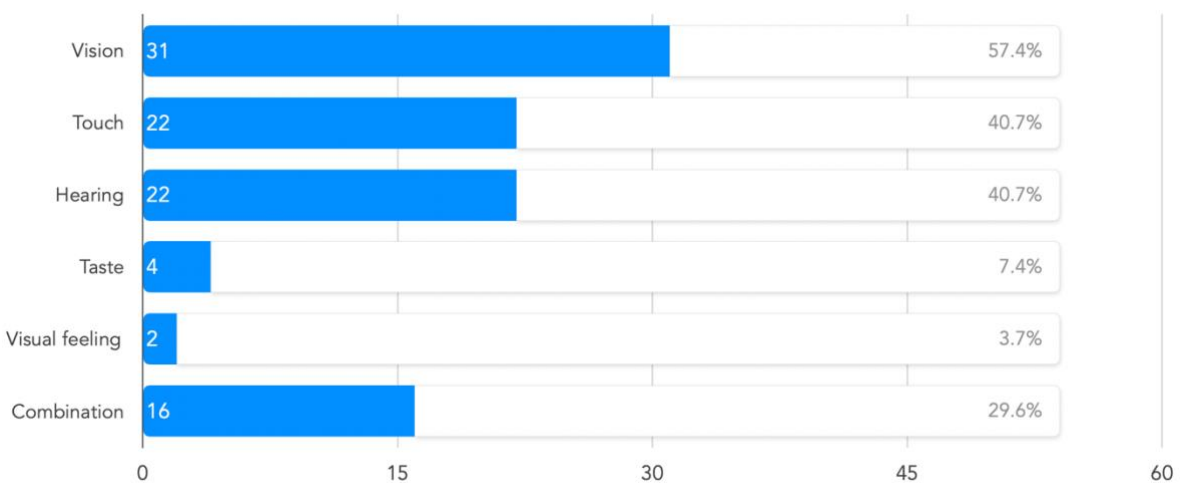


Figure 34 Sensory modality preferences reported by audience members during the New Zealand exhibitions.

To support this perceptual expansion, the curatorial design included prompts encouraging participants to close their eyes and explore the artworks through tactile, auditory, and olfactory channels. One audience member remarked that “closing my eyes made me feel like I was inside the

work; I could sense its rhythm through the vibrations of sound and the texture of the space around me”

(Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022).

This mode of engagement aligns closely with foundational Daoist concepts such as wu-wei (mentioned in Section 3.2.1), qi, and the Daoist principle of the unification of heaven and human (both referred to in Section 3.2.2). Rather than imposing meaning through deliberate visual analysis, many audience members appeared to adopt an intuitive, embodied mode of perception, an orientation that resonates with the Daoist understanding of qi as a dynamic, felt flow within and between bodies. The emphasis on inner sensation and affective resonance over external form echoes the Daoist valuing of following the natural way, where understanding arises through harmonisation rather than effortful control.

The curatorial prompt to close one’s eyes during the exhibition symbolically enacted the principle of wu-wei, inviting participants to suspend visual dominance and engage through openness to other sensory channels. This perceptual shift allowed affect, bodily presence, and sensory flow to guide interpretation, suggesting that aesthetic engagement need not begin with vision but can emerge through quiet receptivity and relational presence. Such responses reflect a culturally situated way of sensing, where non-visual harmonisation is not a compensation for lack but a meaningful form of aesthetic knowledge in itself. Yet the very need for these prompts reveals how strongly mainstream art still privileges vision, often sidelining multisensory possibilities.

By comparison, audience responses in New Zealand rarely foregrounded visceral or “felt-from-within” experience. Few visitors referred to “what I sensed inside”; instead, feedback was more likely to catalogue specific visual and non-visual elements and then articulate their meanings in

relation to diversity, equality, or disability rights. One member with visual impairment from the blind community, for instance, described “*colouring in*” the black-and-white photographs in the mind’s eye (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024). This act of imaginative agency reframed the works’ visual austerity, focusing on mental imagery rather than bodily sensation.

Overall, comments tended towards explicit reasoning and critical appraisal, reflecting a cultural discourse that privileges articulated reflection over tacit, holistic resonance. These divergent affective orientations suggest not only differing cultural attitudes towards bodily perception but also distinct ways in which audiences entered, inhabited, and responded to the spatial environment of the exhibitions. The following section explores how multisensory elements, particularly sound, touch, and smell, shaped immersive experiences and contributed to embodied presence.

6.3.2. Multisensory Spatial Immersion and Place-making

In both cultural contexts, hearing emerged as a dominant modality when visual input was restricted. In response to the statement, “Imagine, with your eyes closed, which senses you most used to perceive your surroundings: hearing, touch, smell, taste. Please fill in the order of feeling,” participants from both countries most frequently identified hearing as the primary sense. In the Chinese exhibition, approximately 58% of respondents identified hearing as the primary sensory channel guiding their aesthetic experience. Similarly, in the New Zealand exhibitions, 65.4% of participants reported relying on auditory cues. The specific distribution of sensory modality preferences in both countries is summarised in Figure 35. Rather than functioning merely as background, sound was described as shaping spatial orientation and affective resonance, particularly in relation to non-visual photography and documentary films. Beyond this focus on individual sensory

input, however, many audiences described a more holistic and immersive experience, one that fused hearing, touch, and smell into a dynamic spatial presence. This suggests that sound operated not in isolation but as part of a larger sensory field that facilitated embodied engagement with the artworks and the exhibition space.

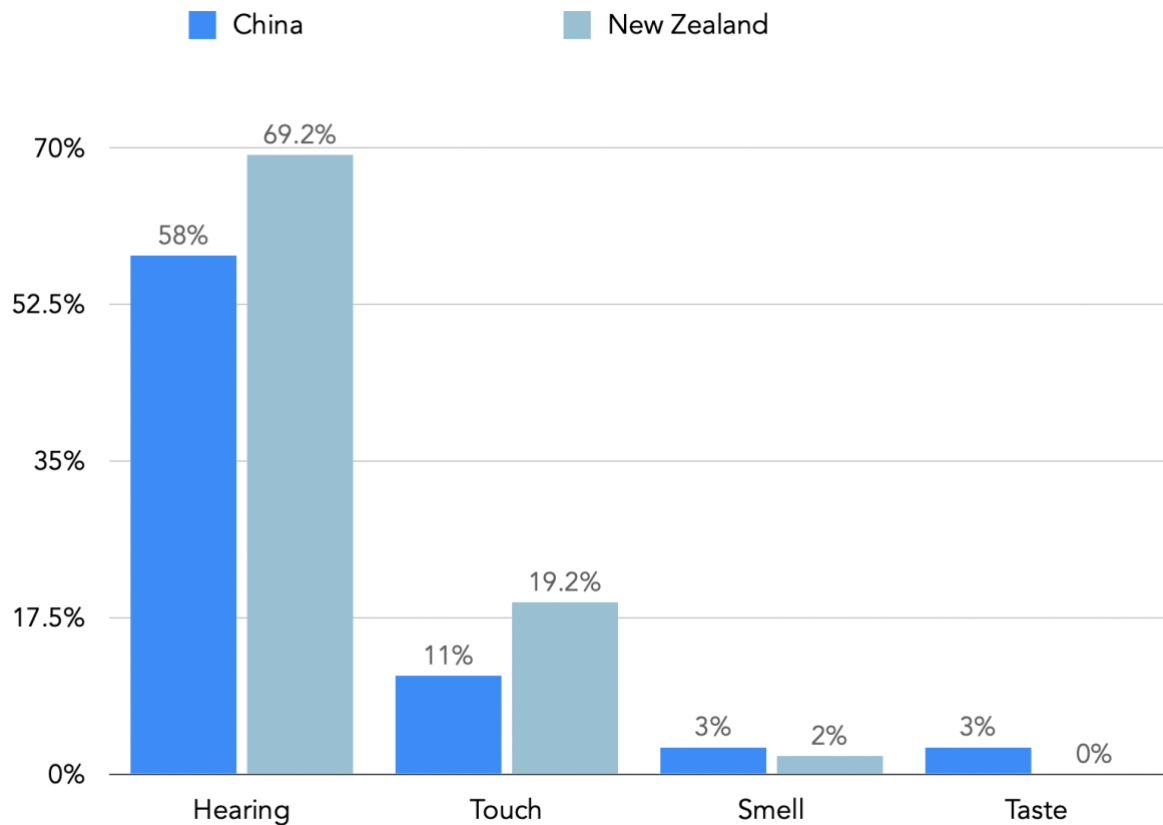


Figure 35 Comparison of primary sensory modalities selected in China and New Zealand when visual input is restricted.

One audience member in China remarked, *“Sound helped me locate myself in space and created an affective connection with the work”* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). This use of sound as a conduit for both spatial awareness and affective harmonisation resonates with phenomenological accounts of embodied perception. As Merleau-Ponty (2012) contended, sensory

input is not passively received but is actively organised through bodily intentionality, where perception and movement co-emerge as lived experience.

In both cultural settings, auditory information was not limited to speech or music but included ambient sound, movement-generated noise, and spatial acoustics. These elements were interpreted not only as supplementary cues but as compositional features that shaped the audience's understanding of the artworks. The act of listening thus became a creative perceptual strategy, enabling participants to reconstruct spatial and emotional dimensions beyond the visual frame.

Although olfactory engagement is rarely foregrounded in conventional exhibition design, several viewers explicitly mentioned its impact. Smell was described as a medium of memory retrieval and affective resonance. For instance, one participant noted: "*Smells brought back stories I had forgotten*" (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). This association suggests a cross-modal interaction between smell and memory, a dynamic rarely foregrounded in ocular-centric curatorial practices. From a Daoist perspective, the integration of smell into the sensory field resonates with the notion that perception is not hierarchical but holistic, involving the spontaneous interplay of spatial awareness and environmental rhythm.

In addition to discrete sensory reports, many participants evoked a more diffuse feeling of "being in" the artwork, an immersive state of integration and resonance that exceeded any single modality. This was especially apparent in reactions to the spatial installations and multisensory environments. Some visitors translated abstract forms into affective analogies. For instance, one viewer in the Chinese exhibition remarked, "*This feels like a memory I didn't know I had*" (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). Others projected internal emotional states onto textures or

auditory cues. One participant stated: *“I perceive the work through a combination of hearing, touch, and smell, just like experiencing nature”* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). These responses suggest that perception did not operate as the sum of isolated inputs but as a relational choreography of space, sensation, and memory.

This orientation closely aligns with what installation artist Mr. Wang described in his interview as a state of *“being present within the work rather than standing outside it”* (personal communication, July 11, 2022). For Mr. Wang, tactile surfaces, ambient sound, and subtle spatial gradients were not decorative elements but essential structural components: *“I didn’t want the audience to just observe the work; I wanted them to feel already inside it, part of it.”* (personal communication, July 11, 2022). This sensory and emotional layering in Mr. Wang’s installation also echoed the Daoist principle of yin and yang, not as binary opposites but as interdependent forces. The work juxtaposed themes of social alienation (loneliness, powerlessness) with those of connection and self-affirmation, not to oppose them but to reveal how each gain meaning through the other.

The balance was mirrored in the interplay of tactile and auditory elements, inviting audiences to move fluidly between vulnerability and strength, quietness and resonance. Rather than categorising these states as positive or negative, the installation enacted a relational dynamic central to Daoist thought, where harmony emerges not from elimination of difference but from the tension and exchange between contrasting energies.

Likewise, dancer Mr. Su described how his movements emerged from responsiveness to tactile and environmental cues, such as the slope of the ground or the texture of fallen leaves: *“When you touch it, you would feel the difference”* (personal communication, July 11, 2022). These artistic

practices construe place less as a fixed container and more as an affective-perceptual field, co-produced by bodies, materials, and sensory flows.

Phenomenologically, this notion of “being in” resonates with Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world and Merleau-Ponty’s account of bodily intentionality, understanding the world, not through detached observation but through situated, corporeal involvement (see Section 3.2.2). From this perspective, the installations acted as engines of place-making: by activating multisensory cues, they offered affordances for bodily movement, pauses, and imaginative engagement (as mentioned in Section 2.3.4). These affordances were not fixed or universal but shaped through each participant’s bodily history and interpretive repertoire, reflecting culturally embedded ways of sensing.

This embodied responsiveness also echoes Daoist concepts such as qi and wu-wei, where perception unfolds through fluid alignment with natural rhythms rather than through imposed control. As Daoist philosophy emphasises, human beings are part of the continuous unfolding of the world and should not seek to dominate or resist it but, rather, engage with it through harmonisation and resonance (Tzu, 2020). From this perspective, the immersive experiences described by both audiences and artists, such as sensations that were “*indescribable, only perceptible by the heart*” (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022), reveal a perceptual logic that resists easy articulation. This visceral quality, often emerging through the integration of multiple senses in the creative process, shaped participants’ embodied perception and aesthetic response in subtle but powerful ways.

Within the creative practices of the artists with visual impairment, this perceptual orientation translated into fluid, non-instrumental artistic approaches aligned with Daoist principles. As the dancer Mr. Su reflected: “*I do not deliberately pursue a certain effect; instead, I let the work present*

itself naturally" (personal communication, July 11, 2022). This creative attitude exemplifies the Daoist ethos of wu-wei, not passivity, but an openness to the inherent rhythm of the process. Rather than correcting or overcoming impairment, such approaches reimagine disability not as a deviation from wholeness but as a form of embodied variation integral to aesthetic expression.

One audience member in China remarked, "*We do not need to deliberately integrate into the mainstream but participate in society in our way.*" While this reflects a Daoist-inflected orientation towards non-intervention, CDS reminds us that structural supports, such as tactile signage, accessible transportation, and anti-discrimination laws, are essential. Without them, such statements risk reinforcing existing mechanisms of exclusion under the guise of natural acceptance.

This approach resonates with practices beyond the Chinese context. For example, American choreographer Steve Paxton, a founder of Contact Improvisation, emphasised spontaneous, non-directed movement that emerges from bodily alignment and environmental responsiveness rather than choreographic control (Rustad, 2024). His work similarly reflects a form of non-interventionist creation, where form and content arise from embodied interaction rather than pre-set intention. Such parallels suggest that wu-wei or effortless action may describe a broader artistic logic rooted in multisensory and affective responsiveness rather than cultural tradition alone.

While such sensations challenge verbalisation, phenomenologists, particularly Merleau-Ponty, have long attempted to articulate precisely these pre-reflective, bodily experiences. Rather than dismissing the ineffable, phenomenological inquiry foregrounds it as central to how meaning emerges through lived embodiment. Similarly, Daoist thought affirms this mode of knowing as legitimate and

generative, framing multisensory attunement not as a failure of expression but as a deeper, relational way of engaging with the world.

Additionally, many audience members, from both the Chinese and New Zealand exhibitions, expressed curiosity about the sensory worlds of the artists. Rather than treating disability as spectacle, the audiences sought to engage with the affective dimensions of artistic creation. Several visitors voiced a desire to understand *“how the blind artists feel through the fingers”* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022) or asked, *“How do people with visual impairment take photographs?”* (Audience response, GAPA Exhibition, 2024). This empathetic turn shifts the audience from passive observation to embodied co-perception, a move that reflects Crip theory’s emphasis on non-normative knowledge and lived difference as sources of aesthetic legitimacy.

However, when notions such as “going with the flow” are used to justify acceptance without action, they risk masking the necessity of structural change, such as accessible infrastructure, inclusive policy, and anti-discrimination measures. As one Chinese viewer noted, *“Disability is not a defect but a unique way of existence”* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). While affirming difference, such views may inadvertently downplay the societal responsibilities towards accessibility and inclusion. From a CDS perspective, genuine acceptance must be rooted not only in cultural understanding but also in the political agency and dignity of disabled communities.

Overall, these findings affirm that embodied responses to disability art are not reducible to biological sensation; they are culturally and philosophically mediated. The strong emphasis on sensory diversity and intuitive perception in the Chinese context echoes traditional Daoist values that prioritise attunement over articulation, process over outcome. In contrast, audience responses from the New

Zealand exhibitions tended to emphasise cognitive reflection and social commentary, with participants more likely to discuss issues such as accessibility, inclusion, and the societal positioning of artists with disabilities.

While Daoist philosophy and phenomenology offer valuable insights into embodied experience and intuitive perception, a critical perspective is needed to expose the gap between cultural ideals and structural realities. Without material changes in policy, infrastructure, and institutional practice, cultural appreciation alone cannot achieve genuine inclusion. This study argues that inclusive art and disability justice require not only philosophical resonance but concrete structural transformation. This need for structural transformation becomes even more apparent when considering how audiences moved beyond passive reception to engage with the sensory perspectives of artists with visual impairment. This shift marked a process of co-perception and participatory reflection, which is further explored in the next section.

6.3.3 Audience Co-perception and Inclusive Engagement

Creative practice, as demonstrated through the four collaborative projects with artists with visual impairment in this research, revealed its capacity to act not only as an expressive tool but also as a vehicle for embodied transformation and social dialogue. These practices enabled sensory reconfiguration and prompted both artists and audiences to interrogate normative assumptions about ability, authorship, and aesthetic value. The transnational exhibitions in China and New Zealand served as testing grounds for the reception and negotiation of these practices, offering insights into how creativity operates across cultural, sensory, and institutional boundaries.

The exhibitions revealed marked differences in cultural reception. In China, many audience members evaluated the works of artists with visual impairment through conventional aesthetic criteria grounded in long-standing visual canons of technique, skill, and beauty (Celikors & Field, 2025). Although several viewers praised the ingenuity of non-visual approaches, questionnaires and comment cards often reverted to “ocular-centric” evaluation, an interpretive frame that privileges sight as the principal measure of artistic merit (El Moussaoui, 2020). Such feedback suggests that the perceptual reorientation envisioned by disability arts remains fragile, constrained by aesthetic ideologies that continue to privilege vision as the dominant route to knowledge and value formation.

To move beyond these entrenched norms, a deeper transformation of cultural and aesthetic values is required. This transformation involves recognising multisensory and embodied forms of creativity not as exceptions or substitutions but as legitimate aesthetic foundations within contemporary artistic discourse. Such transformation may involve adopting principles from disability aesthetics (Siebers, 2010), where difference is not merely accommodated but actively reshapes the criteria through which art is understood and appreciated.

In contrast, audiences in Aotearoa New Zealand were more inclined to focus on the affective and conceptual dimensions of the artworks, such as affective resonance, cultural significance, and political intent. This orientation towards meaning-making over formal qualities aligned more closely with the inclusive aims of the exhibitions. Yet it would be reductive to interpret this contrast as evidence of cultural progressiveness. As CDS scholars have noted, inclusion is not merely a matter of openness to difference but a structural and epistemological challenge: who defines inclusion, on whose terms, and within what institutional logics (Kafer, 2013; Rice et al., 2018)? Cross-cultural

engagement should therefore be understood not as a level field of exchange but as a site shaped by unequal access to cultural capital, curatorial authority, and institutional recognition.

Creative practices, under such conditions, can serve as catalysts for inclusive imagination, but the extent of this inclusivity is shaped by material infrastructures and prevailing cultural norms. One illustrative example is the integration of audio description in the New Zealand exhibitions. Rather than merely conveying factual content, the audio narration enabled visually impaired and sighted audiences to participate in a shared mode of sensory engagement. As noted by one audience member, the experience offered *“a brand new way of understanding art”* (Audience feedback, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024). Despite this promising outcome, the implementation of accessibility measures remained inconsistent. The narration was delivered directly by the researcher, who faced considerable difficulty in articulating concurrent dance movements and affective nuances with sufficient clarity. These challenges point to a broader issue: accessible curation continues to depend heavily on individual labour without adequate institutional or technical infrastructure, thereby limiting the sustainability and equity of multisensory access.

As CDS emphasises, meaningful inclusion should move beyond add-on accommodations towards a deeper interrogation of the structures that determine who is granted the power to create, curate, and interpret (Shildrick, 2020). This requires a shift in curatorial strategies not only in design but in ethics. Instead of translating non-visual experiences into visually dominant codes, curators and institutions should cultivate environments where alternative sensory modalities are not only acknowledged but centred, without being forced into pre-existing aesthetic hierarchies.

For the researcher, the collaborative process with artists with visual impairment in China was a profound form of cross-cultural and epistemological exchange. Through the iterative process of co-developing art grounded in non-visual perception, both the researcher and the artists confronted and revised deeply held assumptions about perception, authorship, and cultural identity. Importantly, these transformations did not arise solely from the completed works but through the everyday negotiations of collaboration, through conversation, friction, experimentation, and failure. However, such encounters also revealed the asymmetries embedded in research-practice collaborations, particularly involving artists with visual impairment and sighted facilitators. Reflexive awareness, shared authorship, and ethical accountability were not merely ideals but necessary responses to the uneven terrain of power within these transnational and transdisciplinary exchanges.

Across these findings, it becomes evident that no single sensory modality or cultural framework alone can account for the richness of audience engagement. Instead, the interplay of intuitive, spatial, and social dimensions reveals how Daoist relationality, phenomenological embodiment, and critical disability perspectives together illuminate the multilayered nature of perception. These insights directly respond to the second research question: How does the perceptual, social, and cultural construction of creative practice of the artists with visual impairment challenge prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art, and vision impairment in China and New Zealand?

While creative practice holds significant potential for embodied transformation and inclusive engagement, that potential can only be realised when the relational, structural, and epistemic conditions of its production are made explicit and subject to ongoing critique. Beyond individual

aesthetic experience, such practices are situated within broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts.

The following section builds on these findings by exploring how collaborative disability arts initiatives contribute to broader institutional and cultural change. Cross-cultural and multisensory modes of engagement serve as key pathways in this process. Inclusive participation, accessibility, and public value emerge through artistic practice. Additional influences include curatorial strategies, infrastructural conditions, and shifting social perceptions of disability in both China and New Zealand.

6.4 Curating Access and Negotiating Value in Disability Arts Exhibitions

6.4.1 Inclusive Access Through Curatorial Practice and Exhibition Infrastructure

This subsection draws on RTA and DSA of one audience questionnaire as well as 158 hours of on-site observation documented through the researcher's reflexive field notes and observational journals during the four exhibitions held in China and New Zealand. The analysis critically examines the implementation and reception of key accessibility measures in the exhibitions, assessing their role in facilitating inclusive participation while foregrounding the material, perceptual, and infrastructural tensions embedded in curatorial design. Each exhibition incorporated a range of accessibility features, audio description, Braille and large-print texts, tactile displays, and QR-code audio guides and accompanied by guided tours. These elements aimed to ensure that audiences with different sensory preferences or impairments could engage with the artworks on their own terms (see Figure 36).



Figure 36 Exhibition accessibility features at New Zealand exhibitions including Braille panels, tactile objects, large-print labels, and mobile-based QR audio guides.

However, several limitations in practice emerged. The use of audio description, while helpful to the blind community, revealed challenges in representing layered sensory content. In particular, the documentary film capturing the improvisational dance project exemplified the difficulty of translating bodily movement, affective nuance, and spatial dynamics into a single-threaded verbal track. The time limitations of audio narration often made it necessary to reduce the level of descriptive

detail. Interview responses from participating artists with visual impairment reflected a divide in reception: the dancer Mr. Su found the description unsatisfying and lacking entertainment value, while others unfamiliar with film culture considered it impressive. Such divergent perspectives underscore the heterogeneity within visually impaired communities and suggest that future iterations of audio description might benefit from integration with environmental soundscapes or concurrent tactile feedback mechanisms to enrich immersion.

Additional issues arose with the use of QR-code audio descriptions, which were intended to allow self-directed exploration via mobile screen readers. While conceptually inclusive, this method posed practical challenges for the users who were totally blind, many of whom struggled to independently locate the codes. As a potential solution, the researcher proposed the use of integrated audio-trigger systems that would signal the location of QR codes when a visitor entered a designated area. However, implementing such a system would require more advanced infrastructure than was available in most of the exhibition venues. In contrast, large-print texts placed adjacent to each artwork received consistently positive responses from visitors with low vision. Interestingly, these labels were also favoured by sighted viewers, demonstrating that accessibility-oriented design can benefit a wider audience than originally anticipated.

Audience responses to the presence of Braille further illuminate the complexities of accessibility design. As this topic was examined in Chapter 5 from the perspective of artists with visual impairment, the current analysis focuses exclusively on audience interpretations. Survey data collected across all four exhibitions revealed that over half of the respondents reported only occasional exposure to Braille in their daily lives, with 35.2% selecting “not sure” regarding its

prevalence. Among all visitors, only one person from Blind Low Vision New Zealand, who was congenitally blind, attempted to read the Braille labels (see Figure 37). She remarked that tactile interpretation was significantly slower than accessing the same information through her mobile screen reader. For most viewers, Braille functioned less as a linguistic system and more as a tactile symbol that invited imaginative engagement. Several participants described the act of touching Braille as prompting reflections on blind embodiment and sensory difference. In this way, Braille operated not only as a tool for access but also as a curatorial strategy of sensory provocation. It challenged ocular-centric modes of engagement and invited a reconsideration of how knowledge might be encountered through touch.

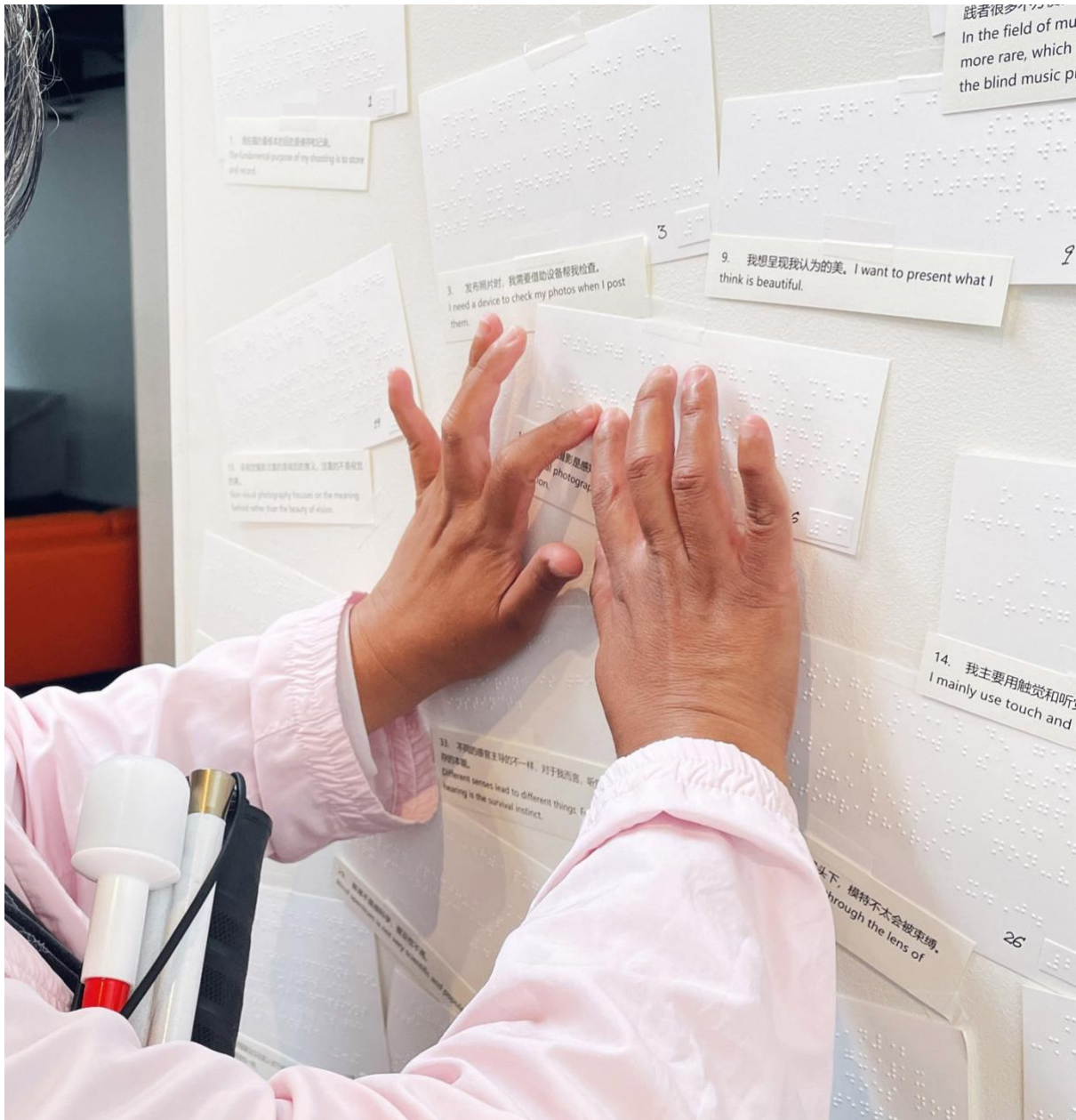


Figure 37 A Blind Low Vision member reads a Braille card during the exhibition.

These findings highlight a central tension in curatorial practice: the gap between universal design principles and the specific, often divergent, needs of distinct disability groups. As installation artist Mr. Wang noted during interview, “*Accessibility depends on which type of disability you are looking at*” (personal communication, July 11, 2022). Tactile floor maps may assist the visitors who are blind but can be inaccessible for wheelchair users; ramps support physical mobility but do little to

address sensory navigation. Such examples reflect the practical and ethical challenges of designing access measures that serve a heterogeneous public, often requiring compromise between competing access needs.

As all four exhibitions were curated by the researcher, the implementation of accessibility services reflected an intentional curatorial strategy shaped by contextual factors. Given the small presence of disabled participants in the Chinese exhibition, particularly people with visual impairment, the researcher deliberately concentrated accessibility efforts on the New Zealand exhibitions, where members of the blind community were actively involved as audience members and collaborators. This strategic focus not only responded to the practical conditions of each site but also illuminated broader disparities in levels of social participation among disabled communities in the two countries.

Despite the greater emphasis placed on accessibility services in the New Zealand exhibitions, several participants with low vision still expressed dissatisfaction with specific aspects of provision, such as the clarity of tactile signage and the timing of audio descriptions. This reinforces the notion that structural inclusion remains an ongoing and unfinished process. These findings underscore that accessibility is not a standardised checklist but a dynamic, context-specific practice that should continually respond to the lived realities of people with disability. Furthermore, the effectiveness of technological or design-based interventions is contingent upon the early and meaningful inclusion of disability perspectives throughout the planning and curatorial decision-making process.

Additionally, the implementation of accessibility services across the exhibitions illustrates that inclusion cannot be separated from broader questions of spatial regulation, material distribution, and curatorial authority. Accessibility is not merely a technical matter of accommodations, but a field of

contested practice in which social values, sensory hierarchies, and institutional constraints intersect (Bradford et al., 2021). The following section builds upon this analysis by examining how such structural arrangements shape the distribution of interpretive power in the exhibition space, drawing upon CDS to interrogate the politics of visibility, authority, and meaning-making.

6.4.2 Disability Aesthetics and Contested Meanings in Audience Interpretation

A. Curatorial Power and Symbolic Access. Despite the researcher's efforts to reframe disability art through alternative sensory strategies and inclusive curatorial methods, audience interpretations were regularly shaped by prevailing disciplinary frameworks and professional orientations. In the New Zealand exhibitions, a substantial number of viewers came from professional fields such as creative arts therapy, occupational therapy, and education. Many of these participants tended to approach the works not primarily as cultural or aesthetic expressions but through a therapeutic lens.

One creative arts therapist, for instance, initiated a conversation with the researcher following the exhibition, expressing a deep sense of inspiration. She described feelings of awe, curiosity, and renewed enthusiasm for multisensory engagement. At the time, she had been exploring alternative modalities for mental health support and noted that the exhibition had fundamentally reshaped her perception of sensory capacity and creative potential.

Similarly, an occupational therapist specialising in music therapy reflected in a written response that the exhibition had prompted her to reconsider how people with visual impairment engage with the world. He noted that although his professional training focused on restoring function, the artworks revealed perceptual and expressive capacities that resisted rehabilitative logics. Instead,

these works reflected autonomous, embodied ways of knowing. Over the following months, he and the researcher collaboratively developed an African drumming workshop for the blind community at Blind Low Vision New Zealand. As he remarked:

As an occupational therapist whose primary role is to restore or enhance function after an impairment, injury, or illness, I was happy to realise that there is work being done to better understand how people with visual impairment experience and perceive the world. This research will without a doubt inform an area of my profession that almost all of my fellow therapists have not explored. (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024)

Such responses highlight the transdisciplinary resonance of disability arts and underscore how artistic practice can catalyse professional reflection and innovation. Nevertheless, this pattern raises critical concerns, as several scholars have cautioned against the instrumentalisation of disability arts within normative systems. For example, Solvang (2018) critiques the framing of disability art through therapeutic or rehabilitative discourses, warning that such approaches may reduce artistic practice to a means of empowerment or social cohesion, thereby undermining its aesthetic and political significance. Similarly, Hadley (2020) and Levy and Young (2020) noted that when the artists with disability are primarily positioned within health or educational settings, the creative agency and aesthetic contributions are frequently subordinated to institutional agendas. This tendency exemplifies the instrumentalisation of disability art, whereby creative expression becomes subsumed under functional frameworks oriented towards outcomes in health, education, and social-care domains.

From the perspective of disability aesthetics, such reductions are deeply problematic. Disability aesthetics challenges normative assumptions about beauty, form, and function (Siebers, 2010). It foregrounds the ways in which non-normative embodiments produce alternative aesthetic forms and meanings. For example, Alison Lapper's self-portraits and Marc Quinn's sculpture, entitled *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, challenge classical ideals of proportion and completeness in visual representation by presenting bodily difference as beauty and strength (Millett-Gallant, 2024). The value of disability art lies not in its ability to "heal" but in its capacity to expand the conditions of perception, challenge visually dominant, and render visible the generative dimensions of difference.

Without denying the productive potential of interdisciplinary engagement, these artistic practices should be recognised as legitimate forms of cultural production, epistemic resistance, and aesthetic innovation. Curatorial approaches require critical sensitivity to the risk of recuperation into narratives grounded in normative bodily assumptions that frame disability in terms of recovery or deficit. Instead, interpretive frameworks, such as disability aesthetics, multisensory curatorial practice, and culturally situated approaches that integrate Daoist philosophy with CDS, should be developed to affirm the creative and critical agency of artists with disabilities. By prioritising non-visual creation, such exhibitions expand the sensory possibilities of art and challenge the dominance of visual-centric aesthetics. Such curatorial approaches expand cultural recognition of who may be acknowledged, viscerally and intellectually, as an artist.

B. Aesthetic Misrecognition in Cross-cultural Settings. Audience responses to accessibility services and non-visual artistic formats revealed significant cultural and conceptual differences between the exhibitions held in China and New Zealand. In China, people with visual impairment and

the blind community were largely absent from the exhibitions. Audience feedback reflected a general lack of familiarity with accessibility infrastructure and a limited awareness of inclusive practices. Responses conveyed vague or negative impressions of accessibility, suggesting that disability remains marginal within dominant cultural imaginaries. In both countries, there was minimal public understanding of disability arts as a distinct field of cultural production, with many respondents unfamiliar with its aesthetic value, creative legitimacy, or critical potential.

By contrast, audiences in New Zealand, where accessibility discourse has gained more public traction, demonstrated a relatively higher degree of awareness regarding accessibility services. However, respondents in both China and New Zealand frequently expressed limited familiarity with disability art or disability aesthetics. This suggests that symbolic inclusion often outpaces meaningful cultural engagement. In both contexts, there was a general lack of understanding of disability arts as a legitimate domain of cultural production, with audiences tending to rely on preconceived frameworks when interpreting non-visual artworks. Chinese audiences were more likely to adopt a deficit-based or medicalised perspective, or to interpret the artworks primarily through a visual-centric lens. In contrast, New Zealand viewers, though more receptive to multisensory formats, frequently engaged with the works within the boundaries of normative sensory expectations.

These findings indicate that aesthetic reception is deeply shaped by prevailing cultural narratives of disability. For example, Harris (2019) argued that audience interpretations of disability performance are frequently constrained by normative aesthetic expectations, shaped by entrenched cultural imaginaries of the disabled body. Similarly, Linett (2017) pointed out that in mainstream Western art and literature, disability is regularly treated as a symbol rather than a real, lived

experience. In the context of museum and gallery engagement, such framings often position disability as incompatible with dominant notions of artistic creativity and aesthetic value. This perspective reinforces the assumption that people with disabilities cannot be recognised as legitimate artists, thereby contributing to their exclusion from mainstream curatorial and interpretive frameworks that continue to privilege normative conceptions of beauty, coherence, and authorship. This underscores the need to cultivate greater public literacy around disability aesthetics and to recognise the critical contributions of artists with disability to contemporary art discourse.

The practical consequences of this uneven literacy become clear when specific curatorial choices are examined. Audience reactions to the exhibition's black-and-white photography provide a salient illustration. While audiences across both national contexts expressed interest in the formal properties of the artworks, such as the textures in installation art and the layering of ambient sound in improvisational dance, interpretations diverged.

In the New Zealand exhibitions, some viewers described black-and-white photographs as generative, offering a perceptual base for imaginative engagement. One visitor remarked, "*The visual effect of black-and-white photography seems like a base, allowing everyone to add different colours in their minds to fit their imagination*" (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024). In contrast, many viewers in China interpreted the same aesthetic format through a deficit-oriented lens. Some equated the absence of colour with loss, absence, or impairment, reinforcing entrenched associations between disability and lack.

Such interpretive patterns point to broader issues of aesthetic misrecognition. This concept highlights how aesthetic injustice can result in the failure to recognise the artistic legitimacy of works

that deviate from dominant aesthetic norms (Dalaqua, 2020). The misrecognition obscures the meaning-making strategies embedded in these works and contributes to epistemic exclusion (Hofmann, 2024). As Cammarano (2015) noted in her analysis of Kara Walker's work, well known for large-scale silhouette installations that deploy antebellum imagery to critique the legacies of slavery, misrecognition often occurs when viewers rely on familiar cultural codes. These codes may include romanticised visions of the American South or racial stereotypes, which lead viewers to overlook the works' subversive commentary on systemic racism. In the context of disability art, a similar dynamic unfolds when audiences approach non-normative sensory practices through preconceived ideals of beauty or ability, leading to sentimental, medicalised, or reductive readings. As a result, artworks produced through non-normative sensory practices risk being read through sentimental, medicalised, or reductive lenses. In this research, black-and-white photography was not deployed as a symbolic shorthand for blindness or absence but as a co-developed perceptual strategy designed to challenge the dominance of colour within ocular-centric visual regimes. By inviting viewers to "complete" the image with affective and cultural imagination, the works encouraged an active and reflexive aesthetic engagement.

However, the intended openness of this strategy was obscured by affective projections rooted in normative expectations. For example, several audience members in both China and New Zealand described the black-and-white images as "*dark*", "*empty*", or "*lacking colour*", with some explicitly linking these visual qualities to blindness or loss (Audience feedback, 2022–2024). These comments suggest that viewers tended to interpret the aesthetic through familiar symbolic associations rather than engaging with the non-visual perceptual strategies proposed by the artists. Such responses were

identified through thematic analysis of open-ended audience comments and observations conducted during the exhibitions. They reflect how visibility continues to shape interpretive frameworks, even in contexts designed to foreground multisensory perception.

When affect is mobilised without accompanying structural or epistemological change, emotional responses may remain surface-level. Such reactions risk becoming superficial gestures of inclusion that reinforce passive spectatorship rather than critically challenging dominant narratives. This tendency was further reflected in audience curiosity and uncertainty about the conceptual basis of the works. This limitation audience understanding of non-visual artistic practices was evident in repeated audience queries such as “*What is non-visual photography?*” or “*What does non-visual mean?*”, questions that underscore the unfamiliarity and conceptual gap surrounding alternative sensory modalities. In response, the researcher explained that non-visual photography encompasses both image-making by blind photographers and the use of non-visual senses, such as touch or sound, by sighted participants to compose photographs. This framing helped audiences consider perception beyond the visual and opened up dialogue about sensory diversity in artistic practice.

Nevertheless, the multisensory elements of the exhibitions were widely acknowledged. According to questionnaire data, over half of the respondents, about 71% in China and 56% in New Zealand, identified the multisensory experience as the most engaging aspect. Many visitors reported being deeply affected by the integration of touch, sound, and spatial composition, signalling the potential for non-visual art to challenge habitual aesthetic hierarchies and provoke alternative ways of sensing and knowing. However, to fully realise this potential, curatorial frameworks should critically engage with disability aesthetics and resist reabsorbing difference into normative aesthetic paradigms.

6.4.3 Transforming Perception Through Sensory Engagement and Relational Understanding

A. From Affective Response to Structural Change. Audience comments from all four exhibitions confirm that admiration alone does not dismantle ocularnormative hierarchies. A Chinese visitor confessed, *“I have not thought that blind people could still have their own world in this field”* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). Another declared that the works were *“more moving than watching a visually impaired person complete a work independently”* (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). Similarly, another visitor mentioned:

I would like to participate in the non-visual art creation in the future; the photography is brilliant, I just cannot believe how you do it and put it all together. And the weaving, I found it is really interesting performed on grass. (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022)

These apparently generous remarks reproduce what Rice et al. (2017) calls the overcoming narrative, a frame that reads disability as lack and applauds artistic success as anomalous. The “shock” registers the structural invisibility of artists with visual impairment in mainstream culture, an epistemic gap that Reid (2025) would label hermeneutical injustice.

Viewers from New Zealand expressed similar sentiments, although framed through a therapeutic perspective. An art therapy professional reported *“mixed emotions of gratitude, awe, wonder, and curiosity ... a perspective on how much human senses’ potential can be stretched”* (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024). Another linked bamboo and tactile dance to *“comfort and sensuality”* (Audience response, SOD Exhibition, 2024). Hadley (2020) described this as the utilitarian turn in disability art, where creative practice is reimagined as a clinical resource. Such affectively charged praise may help raise public visibility of disability art. However, it risks converting

the lived experiences of disability into a tool for able-bodied self-betterment, rather than recognising disabled authorship as an autonomous and legitimate cultural force.

Yet moments of epistemic shift were also recorded. *“Visual impairment does not affect the play of art; it can give people with normal vision different feelings”*, one Chinese respondent concluded after the show (Audience response, Chinese Exhibition, 2022). A New Zealand spectator reflected: *“I saw the world in a way I didn't know before; It was very interesting to experience how different cultures enjoy creating and producing art”* (Audience response, Meteor Theatre Exhibition, 2024).

These comments signal an emerging awareness that sensory difference can expand, rather than diminish, the scope of artistic practice, a stance aligned with Fraser's (2018) disability aesthetics, which values non-normative embodiment as a generator of new forms.

Audience responses in both China and New Zealand demonstrated noticeable changes in understanding art created by people with visual impairment. Yet distinct cultural differences shaped how disability art was perceived. Chinese audiences often framed their interpretations through narratives of social progress, rehabilitation, or educational development, resonating with discourses of “special education”. By contrast, New Zealand audiences more frequently highlighted individual experience, equitable sensory access, and mental health, drawing on more established disability rights discourses. These differences reflect divergent cultural constructions of disability and underscore the importance of grounding institutional reform in locally situated understandings. Without such critical attention to context, visibility alone risks reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than transforming the structures through which disability art is produced, interpreted, and valued.

Whether this emerging awareness of disability aesthetics becomes structurally transformative depends largely on the responsiveness of cultural, educational, and policy-making institutions. While the social model of disability has been instrumental in highlighting the importance of barrier removal, the model remains limited in addressing deeper issues of authorship, power, and institutional control. As critics such as Shakespeare (2017) have noted, the classic social model underplays the complexities of impairment, embodiment, and economic precarity. Drawing on a rights-based approach, Degener (2016) emphasised that people with disability hold not only the right to access cultural spaces but also the right to define, produce, and lead cultural discourse. This perspective challenges institutional structures that continue to marginalise disabled voices by restricting their interpretive authority. From this perspective, interpretive authority is not a privilege granted by institutions but a right inherent to people with disability as cultural agents.

These observations point to three intertwined requirements for genuine structural change. First, affective responses should be converted into public literacy on disability aesthetics: only when “surprise” is replaced by informed recognition can artists with disability escape the overcoming narrative and be acknowledged as routine cultural producers rather than inspirational anomalies. Second, curatorial and educational settings should challenge the reductive framing of disability art as a tool for therapy. Without clearly separating therapeutic function from artistic expression, artists with disability risk being structurally marginalised within cultural production. Third, meaningful transformation demands a redistribution of power, moving beyond access provision towards co-curation and shared governance. This change enacts a political-relational approach, as outlined by Kafer (2013) and further developed in recent cultural-policy debates by McDonald and Hadley (2019).

Only through such coordinated moves, from sentiment to literacy, from instrumentalisation to autonomy, and from consultation to leadership, can affective resonance evolve into sustained recognition of artists with disability as core agents within contemporary aesthetic discourse.

B. Co-presence and the Researcher's Reflexive Insights. Following the preceding discussion from audience perspectives, this section adopts the standpoint of the researcher and examines the multi-layered positionality that shaped the research. Positioned simultaneously as investigator, artistic practitioner, collaborator, and curator, the researcher engaged with methodological, ethical, and power-related dimensions that amplified the study's complexity. Through combined frameworks drawn from phenomenology, CDS, and Daoist philosophy, the analysis examines how empathy emerged and was interpreted during the exhibitions. Each encounter was situated within specific relational structures, cultural contexts, and philosophical assumptions that shaped its meaning and reception. Curatorial choices, embodied participation, and audience feedback functioned as interdependent elements within an evolving aesthetic field in which the meanings of disability, perception, and authorship remained open to continual negotiation.

From a phenomenological perspective, encounters such as touching textured surfaces, sensing low-frequency vibrations, or listening to narrative sound in subdued light created conditions for "feeling with" rather than merely "feeling about" artwork. Perception shifted from detached observation towards an experience co-produced through bodies and spatial context. Visual primacy was deliberately de-centred to affirm the epistemic and aesthetic legitimacy of non-visual sensory pathways. These were not positioned as compensatory mechanisms but as generative modalities through which perception, meaning, and aesthetic value are co-constituted. Such a curatorial move

reconfigures perception as a dynamic interplay between the sensing body and its environment, where knowledge arises not from detached observation but from the lived immediacy of experience (Neubauer et al., 2019). In this context, vision is neither privileged nor universal; instead, it becomes one among many sensory orientations, opening space for marginalised modes of knowing to emerge as central to both artistic expression and audience engagement.

Daoist philosophy provided an allied ethical orientation. A curatorial ethos grounded in wu-wei and the Daoist concept of the unification of heaven and human sought to facilitate engagement indirectly, through atmosphere, ambiguity, and suggestion, inviting audience self-adjustment within states of uncertainty. The absence of visual dominance and the presence of diverse sensory cues resonated with Daoist valuations of incompleteness and formlessness. Within such an environment, empathy appeared not as mastery over another's experience but as co-presence premised on mutual sensory openness and responsiveness.

Insights from CDS caution against replicating "inspirational disability" tropes. When affective resonance remains confined to shock or healing, disability risks appropriation as a motivational resource. Empathy retains critical significance only when interpretive authority is centred on artists with disabilities, prompting audiences to critically engage with their own sensory frameworks and the cultural assumptions that shape perception. Consequently, curation should operate as a dialogic practice characterised by continuous negotiation and attentive listening rather than unidirectional representation.

The multisensory strategy cultivated a form of empathy better described as cognitive humility, an acknowledgment that diverse modes of perception, cognition, and creation possess equivalent

validity and vitality. Phenomenology's suspension of certainty and Daoism's orientation towards responsive flow both demonstrate that understanding emerges from presence, attentiveness, and the relinquishment of fixed meaning. Viewed through this lens, the exhibitions offered more than access or awareness. The artworks constituted relational spaces of reconfiguration, where disability operated as a generative force within contemporary cultural and aesthetic production.

These insights underscore the importance of curatorial practice not merely as a form of presentation, but as an embodied, ethical, and epistemic intervention that shapes how disability is encountered, interpreted, and valued. However, understanding the transformative potential of disability art requires more than examining audience responses or institutional frames. The understanding demands close attention to the creative processes themselves, how artists with visual impairment engage with materials, space, and collaborative practices in ways that challenge normative assumptions and cultivate new sensory pathways. The following chapter turns to these practices, exploring the lived and co-created experiences that formed the foundation of the exhibitions.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Overview

Building upon the empirical analysis and theoretical framework developed in Chapters 5 and 6, this chapter aims to advance the level of interpretation, deepen the understanding of the findings, and articulate the original contributions of the research in a systematic manner. In contrast to the previous chapters, which are grounded primarily in empirical data, this chapter integrates practical experience with theoretical reflection. While directly addressing the research questions, the discussion engages critically with existing scholarly debates and seeks to extend these academic discourses.

This chapter is structured around the discussion of the four central research questions that underpin the present study:

- RQ 1: How does the perceptual, social, and cultural construction of creative practice of the artists with visual impairment challenge prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art, and vision impairment in China and New Zealand?
- RQ 2: How do artists with visual impairment navigate and challenge visual-centric creative traditions?
- RQ 3: How can the dual perspectives of the participant-researcher, as collaborator, co-developer, and curator, and the artists with visual impairment be integrated into creative practice as research?
- RQ 4: How do the multi-media and multisensory artistic practices of artists with visual impairment shape audience understandings of culture, art, and disability?

Chapters 5 and 6, respectively addressing “audience experience” and “collaborative art practices”, offer two complementary perspectives that underpin the integrative discussion presented in this chapter. The collaborative creative processes illuminated the ways in which artists with visual impairment engaged in artistic expression through non-visual modalities such as touch, hearing, spatial awareness, and bodily memory. Simultaneously, the analysis revealed that the researcher operated through a composite role as co-creator and curator. Through processes of co-development and collaboration, knowledge was jointly constructed and expressive forms were collectively shaped. Together, these two chapters delineated the dynamic interplay among sensory pathways, social structures, and cultural discourses within artistic practice. This provided the empirical grounding and analytical material for the theoretical integration and critical reflection undertaken in Chapter 7.

Through an analysis of curatorial strategies and audience feedback, the research further reveals the complex and dynamic interrelations among sensory experience, cultural context, and the perception of disability. Within the multisensory exhibition environment, audiences engaged in embodied and perceptual ways, thereby challenging vision-centred aesthetic hierarchies and prompting a reinterpretation of concepts such as “disability” and “normalcy”. This reconfiguration is manifested not only in affective resonance and perceptual awareness of difference but also in the tensions between aesthetic misinterpretation and symbolic accessibility.

Extending the preceding research findings, this chapter concentrates on five interrelated domains of theoretical inquiry and critical reflection:

(1) A discussion on the reconfiguration of sensory aesthetics and normative embodiment, elucidating how non-visual artistic practices challenge vision-dominated aesthetic traditions and foster more inclusive modes of perception and embodied understanding.

(2) An exploration of disability arts through a shift from co-creation to co-presence, examining how such practices stimulate imaginaries of inclusive social structures and provoke critique of existing institutional frameworks.

(3) A discussion on collaborative artistic processes, focusing on the negotiation of power, the co-construction of knowledge, and the articulation of expressive agency across intersecting roles.

(4) An evaluation of the study's integrative methodological approach, addressing the demands of multisensory, embodied, transdisciplinary, and participatory artistic practices.

(5) A consideration of the limitations encountered during the research process and the potential directions for future inquiry.

Through these discussions, this chapter not only relocates the theoretical positioning of the study's findings but also demonstrates the distinctive perspective, methodological innovation, and social relevance of the research in the fields of disability arts, critical sensory theory, and collaborative creative practice. These contributions are grounded in phenomenological inquiry, CDS, and Daoist philosophy, which together provide an integrated framework for understanding embodied difference, creative practices, and disability aesthetics.

7.2 Reframing Sensory Aesthetics and Challenging Normative Embodiment

Within the long-standing vision-centred art system, seeing has functioned not merely as a fundamental mode of perception but also as a symbol of aesthetic judgement, cultural authority, and

epistemic legitimacy (Parisi et al., 2017). While modernist art introduced experimental approaches that extended beyond strict visual realism (Henning, 2018; Lepecki, 2016), its underlying aesthetic logic remained predominantly vision-based. In Chinese ink painting, notions such as *yijing*, described as “resonance of the spirit” (Zhang et al., 2024, p. 271), and *xieyi*, characterised as “an ideographic style, expressing artists’ feelings” (Zhang et al., 2024, p. 275), aim to evoke spiritual resonance through codified visual forms. Meanwhile, Western photography, especially as theorised through the lens of representational fidelity, prioritised visual realism, framing perception through light, shadow, and technical mastery (Sontag, 2021). For disabled bodies, particularly in the context of sensory disabilities such as visual impairment, this visual hegemony not only excludes the possibility of expressing non-visual experiences but also reinforces the normative imagination of “able-bodied” modes of perception as the standard. Against this backdrop, this study interrogates how sensory aesthetics might be reframed when vision is decentred as the default arbiter of artistic value and knowledge.

In contrast, within the multisensory artistic practices of this research, visual hegemony is systematically challenged. Through non-visual photography, improvised music and dance, and the creation of tactile installations, participants challenge the perceptual logic of “seeing as truth” and reveal the diversity and creativity of sensory experience. Grounded in collaborative artistic processes, these practices reconfigure perceptual pathways and aesthetic logics through hearing, touch, spatial awareness, and bodily memory. This directly responds to the research question (RQ 2) of this study: How do artists with visual impairment navigate and challenge visual-centric creative traditions? Crucially, this challenge is not advanced through demonstration alone, but through an immersive, co-creative methodology in which the researcher and artists work as collaborators rather than within an

observer-subject relation. The methodological stance is therefore constitutive of the aesthetic reframing, not ancillary to it. This constitutive alignment of method and aesthetics constitutes a key methodological contribution of this study.

A clear distinction should be made that what this study challenges is the reliance on ocularcentrism, rather than the negation of the role of vision itself. Vision remains an important and expressive sensory modality, but it has long been regarded as the “default standard” for evaluating artistic value and the validity of knowledge, a status that deserves to be re-examined. In the four exhibitions of this study, the majority of the audience, even including some people with low vision, still regarded vision as the primary mode of appreciating artworks. This tendency shows that even in exhibition environments intentionally designed to highlight other sensory pathways, the habitual thinking of ocularcentrism continues with stubborn persistence. By consciously incorporating non-visual senses such as touch, hearing, or proprioception into the processes of creation and curation, this study seeks to expand the ways in which art is appreciated and created. This process is not about replacing vision with another sense but about opening up a plural and fluid sensory order in which vision becomes one of many senses, rather than the sole authority.

This repositioning resonates with a wider trajectory in disability arts and visual culture studies, where artists have developed non-visual practices to challenge ocular-centric conventions. The work of blind photographers such as Pete Eckert (n.d.) and Evgen Bavcar (Carlwhetham, n.d.) offers instructive examples of how perception can be redefined beyond the primacy of vision. Eckert’s photographic practice relies on internal visualisation and cognitive imagery (McCulloh, 2013), while Bavcar constructs images through bodily memory and sound, demonstrating that perception is both

embodied and distributed (Europe of Cultures, 1996). Their work affirms the potential of photography to move beyond its etymological ties to the notions of capturing vision and writing with light (Batchen, 2021; Bate, 2016), and to be redefined through alternative perceptual logics. By contrast, the present research operationalises non-visual practice as a situated, collaborative process that integrates making, curating, and audience encounter across two cultural contexts. Rather than relying primarily on internal visualisation, the practices analysed in this study are co-developed through non-visual sensory interaction. This extends existing work by showing how non-visual aesthetics can be designed, negotiated, and sustained within a shared creative ecology.

Building on this operationalisation, the artistic practices examined in this research are not conceived as forms of “substitution” or “compensation” for visual absence but, rather, as body-centred reconfigurations which is the reorientations of sensory hierarchy grounded in embodied interaction. These practices not only give rise to artistic works but also constitute direct interventions in, and critiques of, hierarchical sensory regimes. For instance, the photographer Mr. Jiang remarked, *“Non-visual photography is essentially an extension of perception”* (personal communication, September 30, 2022). This statement affirms a central understanding of non-visual photographic concept: image-making does not require visual input but can emerge from embodied interactions between the body, space, and materials. Such an approach repositions photographic practice as a situated, multisensory engagement with the world. Within this framework, non-visual creative approach serves both as creative methodologies and as critical epistemological provocations, challenging the dominance of vision in aesthetic, cultural, and institutional systems. In this research, the term non-visual creative approach is used as an umbrella concept to describe artistic practices

that centre non-visual modalities, such as touch, hearing, spatial awareness, proprioception, and bodily memory, as primary means of expression and perception.

Yet the very visibility of celebrated artists with disability, particularly people recognised for pioneering non-visual creative approaches, also exposes a persistent oversight: such visibility too often frames their practice as a heroic triumph over impairment, while the structural conditions that enable, or limit, their work remain underexamined. In this research, for instance, Mr. Jiang's creative process unfolded not in a vacuum of individual "genius", but within a network of tactile interfaces, verbal description, and institutional support that framed what could be imagined and shared. From a CDS perspective, the critical issue is not the aestheticization of sensory alternatives but the ongoing privileging of sighted epistemologies through curatorial practices, funding priorities, and audience expectations, even when visibility appears to have been displaced. Daoist thought further reminds that genuine wu-wei resists coercive technological or pedagogical interventions that merely re-route ocular authority without altering its structure. Thus, the future of non-visual art or disability art depends not only on refining alternative perceptual logics but on transforming the material and institutional ecologies that determine whose perception counts and whose images circulate.

Furthermore, this reframing has taken institutional form. In 2020, Canon Hong Kong and the Arts with the Disabled Association Hong Kong (ADAHK) hosted a non-visual photography workshop and exhibition. Participants with visual impairment produced compelling images by relying on touch, sound, and spatial intuition. The exhibition featured audio descriptions, Braille, and tactile elements, allowing both blind and sighted audiences to engage with the works on an inclusive sensory plane

(Canon Hong Kong, 2020). These examples show that non-visual photography can function not only as creative empowerment but also as public pedagogy.

Nevertheless, this reinterpretation is not without critique. Some scholars argue that non-visual photography or non-visual creative approach risks romanticising blindness or aestheticising impairment (Grundell, 2018; Harris, 2019). The researcher in this study contends that such risks arise when artistic practices focus solely on sensory substitution or symbolic novelty without addressing the structural exclusions that artists with disability face. In this regard, it is vital to distinguish between aesthetic inclusion and epistemic justice. Does non-visual photography truly decentre vision, or does it risk reproducing a revised form of visual normativity, one in which vision is simply re-routed rather than rethought? Put differently, does the turn to non-visibility unsettle the sensory order, or does it risk reinstalling a revised visual normativity under the guise of accessibility?

From a phenomenological standpoint, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's notion of bodily intentionality, non-visual creative approach is not defined by the absence of vision but by the presence of embodied action. For example, the act of photographing becomes a way of situating the body in relation to its environment, unfolding perception through touch, movement, and somatic memory (Neubauer et al., 2019). In this sense, photography is reimagined not as a product of sight but as an event of corporeal knowing. On this account, photography is less a function of sight than an event of corporeal knowing that can be designed and studied within collaborative, practice-based research.

From a CDS and Crip theory perspective, non-visual creative approach should not be framed as a compensatory strategy to overcome visual loss. Rather, it affirms disability as a site of cognitive and cultural difference, where new perceptual logics and artistic possibilities emerge. In doing so, the

practice challenges aesthetic hierarchies and reframes disability art as a space for renegotiating sensory authority, authorship, and inclusion. This matters because it reframes disability art as a site for renegotiating sensory authority and authorship, with practical consequences for curatorial ethics, inclusive pedagogy, and institutional policy.

This positioning underscores why this research is unique: it not only reframes non-visual artistic practice within a co-creative, embodied methodology but also situates this reframing in dialogue with wider debates on visual impairment, communication, and disability rights. In doing so, it speaks to, and extends, current conversations occurring in diverse cultural contexts, demonstrating how non-visual creative practices can operate simultaneously as aesthetic innovations and as culturally embedded interventions. Such integration of methodological, aesthetic, and sociocultural dimensions not only consolidates this strand of the discussion but also points towards new possibilities for embedding non-visual creative practices within inclusive artistic and institutional ecologies.

7.3 Reimagining an Inclusive Society Through Disability Arts

7.3.1 Rethinking Inclusion Through Embodied Creative Practice

Building on the critique of sensory aesthetics and normative structures of embodiment presented in the previous section, the focus of this section shifts from the reconstruction of individual experiences to a rethinking of social relations and logics of inclusion. Findings from this research reveal that, within non-visual artistic practices, disability does not constitute a barrier to creativity. On the contrary, many artists with visual impairment deliberately seek to move beyond reliance on vision, achieving a fusion between body and environment that enables a more nuanced and embodied mode of perception. Such practices not only challenge dominant assumptions that equate disability with

limitation but also pose a fundamental question: can an inclusive society be grounded in the genuine recognition of perceptual difference and bodily heterogeneity? The discussion speaks directly to the research question:

- RQ 1: How does the perceptual, social, and cultural construction of creative practice of the artists with visual impairment challenge prevailing interpretations of creativeness, art, and vision impairment in China and New Zealand?
- RQ 3: How can the dual perspectives of the participant-researcher, as collaborator, co-developer, and curator, and the artists with visual impairment be integrated into creative practice as research?

This section responds to this inquiry by foregrounding disability arts not merely as a creative practice but as a form of epistemic action and ethical declaration. Modes of coexistence are reimagined through specific bodily pathways, spatial experiences, and sensory strategies.

Dominant cultural narratives celebrate independence and self-reliance, framing disability as a form of non-normativity to be managed through adaptation or accommodation (Goodley, 2020). However, as CDS argue, so-called “problems” (Shildrick, 2020, p. 37) are rarely intrinsic limitations and more often the product of structural constraints shaped by institutions, environments, and cultural understandings. The creative practices undertaken by the artists with visual impairment in this study clearly illustrate that bodily difference does not inherently impede artistic production. On the contrary, such difference may, in certain contexts, function as a generative force that enriches creative expression. As the dancer Mr. Su noted in the interview, vision can sometimes interfere with movement, making it more difficult to focus on internal rhythms and spatial awareness (personal

communication, July 11, 2022). A similar insight emerged during the researcher's own engagement in the improvisational dance project, where closing the eyes enhanced the capacity to perceive movement, spatial flow, and bodily coordination with a partner. This experiential reversal undermines dominant logics that treat disability as functional limitation, instead highlighting the epistemic force and creative potential of divergent perceptual pathways.

Crip theory provides a crucial theoretical lens for understanding the non-visual practices explored in this research. Rather than treating disability as a condition in need of repair, Crip theory frames it as a critical intervention into normative bodily assumptions, perceptual ethics, and temporal structures (Abrams & Abes, 2021). However, Crip theory alone does not fully capture the phenomenological richness of non-visual perception, the embodied dynamics of collaborative creation, or the sensory reconfigurations that emerge in artistic practice. For this reason, the present research combines Crip theory with phenomenology and Daoist philosophy, enabling an analysis that not only engages critically with normative sensory hierarchies but also foregrounds the generative reconstruction of perceptual and creative processes. Within this framework, embodied difference emerges as an embodied stance of resistance, carving out alternative modes of existence through the refusal to conform to conventional perceptual and normative social expectations. The non-visual creative practices presented in this research do not seek to imitate mainstream artistic forms or produce predetermined outcomes. Instead, these practices unfold through sustained interactions with sensory elements such as touch, sound, space, and smell, gradually giving rise to distinctive perceptual rhythms and spatial logics. This approach reflects a conscious rethinking of established perceptual structures and fosters expressive strategies that operate independently of visual norms.

Throughout this process, the artists' embrace of "slowness", "invisibility", and "exploration" manifests what crip time conceptualises as a non-normative temporality, one that resists the pressure to conform to fast-paced productivity and instead values open-ended, ongoing engagement (Wood, 2017). Such temporal structures generate alternative artistic vocabularies and invite audiences into a different ethical mode of relation, in which ambiguity, indeterminacy, and non-immediacy are not only tolerated but valued as meaningful experiences.

Daoist philosophy provides a complementary perspective for understanding these temporal and sensory reconstructions. Daoist philosophy emphasises *wu-wei*, which includes non-coercive action and spontaneity, meaning that perception arises through alignment with the unfolding of phenomena rather than through mastery over them (Cheng, 2017). This ethical value of sensibility is openness, responsiveness, and the ability to live within ambiguity. These qualities strongly resonate with the slow, exploratory, and relational modes of creation emphasised by crip time observed in this study. By privileging harmonisation over control, Daoist thought reframes artistic practice not as the imposition of form upon matter but as a mutual transformation between artist, materials, and environment. Such an ethos directly supports the rejection of ocular-centric demands for fixed, visually legible outcomes, legitimising instead the embodied and multisensory logics that shape the collaborations in this research.

An example is the improvised music project in this research. Improvised music, particularly within the Western avant-garde and experimental tradition, is frequently celebrated for its responsiveness and departure from fixed compositional structures. Rather than adhering to a written score, improvisation allows performers to generate sound through moment-to-moment interactions

with materials, space, and each other (McAuliffe, 2021). In this project, the musician Mr. Kong described improvisation as *“a state of mind in the moment, something that bursts out instantly”* (personal communication, October 22, 2022). This approach was realised through the collaborative use of handmade bamboo flutes and ceramic instruments, where sound emerged from the physical interaction with natural materials rather than technical mastery.

The absence of predetermined rhythm or structure allowed the performers to engage in a shared sonic exploration shaped by ambient acoustics, touch, and resonance. This process aligned closely with the Daoist principles of wu-wei and flow, where creation unfolds without imposition. Instead of controlling the performance, Mr. Kong and the researcher attuned themselves to the sonic environment, responding organically to texture, echo, and vibration. Such practice reconfigures music not as a product of formal training or representational intention but as an embodied, relational act grounded in sensory presence. Significantly, this collaborative process blurred the boundaries between artistic production and shared discovery, revealing how improvised music-making could function both as an exploration of sensory aesthetics and as a medium for rethinking how artistic relationships are formed and sustained. What is particularly interesting here is the parallel between this approach and broader strands of experimental and disability arts that challenge the primacy of pre-determined structure, privileging instead the immediacy of bodily and environmental attunement. These resonances position the work not only within the specific context of this collaboration but also within wider debates on how improvisation can unsettle entrenched sensory hierarchies and open up alternative pathways for creative and social connection.

However, a critical lens cautions against romanticising improvisation solely as spontaneous freedom. As the researcher reflected, improvisational practice risks displacing the value of structural depth, coherence, and sustained artistic labour. From a CDS perspective, celebrating sensory immediacy without attending to the institutional support and cultural framing that make such performances possible may obscure underlying asymmetries. Daoist thought does not reject structure altogether but invites a mode of action that resists coercion, an orientation that offers ethical grounding, not a justification for unexamined spontaneity. Taken together, these collaborative projects demonstrate why this research is distinctive: it reframes non-visual creative practice as a shared human venture that is at once methodological, aesthetic, and relational. The work speaks to broader discussions on visual impairment, communication, and disability rights, while offering an innovative model of immersive, co-creative research that challenges the primacy of vision. The significance lies not only in the artworks produced but in the mutual transformations experienced by all participants, artists, and researcher alike, extending beyond the project into new artistic initiatives and ways of engaging with the world.

7.3.2 Sensory Engagement and Audience Perception in Participatory Art

From the audience's perspective, the researcher observed that once non-visual works were introduced into the exhibition space, many audience members underwent a shift from being "viewers" to becoming "participants". Some sighted visitors, after watching or listening to the creative process of non-visual photography in the documentary film (Ma, 2022b), attempted to take photographs without relying on vision. Participants were compelled to engage sensory modalities not commonly prioritised in everyday experience. This process fostered an awareness that the relationship between

the body and space could be reconfigured beyond the dominance of vision. However, some audience members, when encountering non-visual artworks, still instinctively reverted to familiar visual languages and logics, attempting to situate unfamiliar sensory experiences within recognisable frameworks. This tendency reflects a strong reliance on intelligibility within mainstream culture and reveals a general difficulty in accommodating ambiguity, non-explanatory states, or experiences that resist naming when encountering difference.

In this regard, Daoist philosophy offers a critical ethical framework for perception. In contrast to Western emphases on clarity and subject control, Daoism advocates *wu-wei* and alignment with natural unfolding, respecting the fluidity and unpredictability of experience (Cheng, 2017). The curatorial practice in this research was grounded in this principle, deliberately avoiding extensive explanatory language and refraining from translating non-visual experiences into visual or “readable” outcomes. The spatial arrangement, design of artworks, and the modes of prompting within the exhibition embodied a structure of “non-coercion” and “non-control”, avoiding prescriptions of “how to see” or “what to understand” and instead inviting visitors to explore and adapt within their own sensory rhythm. This curatorial approach reflected a respect for the irreducibility of different experiences, encouraging audiences to remain, reflect, and engage within what is unarticulated and unnamed. Through such uncertainty and hesitation, a more ethically charged relationship with the artworks was generated.

While the very term *disability art* signals a focus on “disability” over “art”, seeking within the artistic domain either supplementary modes of access or the translation of artworks into alternative formats, the curatorial approach developed in this study intentionally resists such translation. This

research positions hesitation, partial incomprehensibility, and the embodied process of negotiation as intrinsic components of the artistic encounter itself. Shaped jointly by the Daoist ethics of perception and the phenomenological narratives of participants engaged in the creative process, this curatorial ethos operates not merely as an accessibility strategy but as an innovative intervention into dominant perceptual logics.

In addition, unlike many existing disability art or disability activities that measure their success through the extent of audience comprehension or empathetic engagement, the creative and curatorial approach developed in this research redefines the value of the “encounter”. This situates the value within the capacity to sustain distance and to resist immediate closure. The formation of the curatorial stance is inextricably linked to the researcher’s own shift in position over years of sustained practice. In the initial stages of the project, the researcher, much like the prevailing discourses, tended to interpret disability art and disability itself through the lenses of “understanding” and “empathy”. However, through prolonged and in-depth collaboration and observation, it became evident that the modes of cooperation and the epistemic pathways generated in the creative processes between artists with and without disabilities far exceeded the public’s existing imaginaries of “disability art” and “disability”. This insight challenges entrenched sensory hierarchies and re-established both non-visual aesthetics and disability art as foundational and critical sites for the reconfiguration of creative practice.

For instance, the interactive installation art featured in the exhibition, where the collaboratively developed installation artwork, co-created by Mr. Wang and the researcher as part of the multisensory exhibition, functioned as a bridge for communication among the artist with visual

impairment, the sighted collaborator, and the audience. The tactile and participatory nature of the work was shaped by Western participatory art practices, which framed interactivity as a form of social engagement (Ledwith & Springett, 2022). Retrospectively, the sensory ethos of the installation, especially its emphasis on intuitive, non-coercive interaction, was interpreted through the lens of Daoist philosophy, particularly the principle of *wu-wei*, which emphasises attunement with natural rhythms and effortless presence (Singh, 2014). Rather than positioning the audience as passive recipients, the installation invited active, self-directed exploration grounded in embodied responsiveness.

This emphasis on a haptic-first approach emerged directly from Mr. Wang's lived experience of visual impairment and his sustained critique of visual dominance in art-making. The installation prioritised touch, temperature, and spatial awareness as primary sensory modes. Materials were selected and arranged not for visual effect but to be encountered through the fingertips, foregrounding variations in texture, density, and thermal resonance. This shift away from optical aesthetics initially appears to align with Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied perception, in which the body is viewed as an active source of meaning rather than a passive conduit. However, it prompts a deeper inquiry into how tactile engagement structures perceptual understanding.

Drawing on van Manen (2023), touch should not be reduced to a sensory channel but understood as a mode of relational being. Through tactile engagement, the body does not simply receive information; instead, this interaction brings the person into existential contact with the world. In this view, the installation becomes more than a site of sensory input. Van Manen (2023) describes this engagement as offering "pathic knowledge" (p. 22), through which the body feels its way into

spatial and material presence. For the installation artist Mr. Wang in this research, the act of arranging and selecting materials was not about substituting sight with touch but about cultivating a tactile intentionality, a lived orientation that carries affective, atmospheric, and spatial meaning. This understanding moves beyond generic claims of embodiment and grounds the installation in a phenomenological ethic of relational presence.

The participatory structure of the installation aligned with broader debates in relational aesthetics. As Bishop (2024) argued, participatory art holds the potential to reconfigure the role of the spectator, shifting from passive observer to co-creator, but may also risk becoming overly instrumental or symbolic. In the exhibitions in this study, the multisensory engagement of the audience from both China and New Zealand redefined the boundaries of reception. Rather than “viewing” the artwork, audiences navigated it through tactile and spatial experience, reframing the act of seeing as a distributed sensory process. This shift reflected what Bishop later termed the “social turn” in contemporary art, which repositions embodied interaction between audience and the artworks as a valid and significant artistic modality (Bishop, 2023, p. 219).

Therefore, the significance of this research lies not only in articulating how non-visual artistic practices operate but in grounding this articulation in the phenomenology of practice as lived by the participating artists. Accounts from the artists revealed ways of reconfiguring sensory hierarchies, engaging bodily memory, and negotiating spatial relations beyond visual dominance. These insights, in turn, informed both the curatorial decisions and the interpretive framing, ensuring that the methodology emerged from within practice rather than being externally imposed. This significance also emerges through a systematic response, across curatorial methodology, audience engagement,

and theoretical application, to critical reflections within contemporary disability arts concerning the “impulse to understand” and the ethics of legibility.

In recent years, an increasing body of scholarship has begun to explore how disability art can stimulate public awareness of perceptual difference (Hadley, 2020; McDonald & Hadley, 2019; Solvang, 2018), and some curatorial practices have experimented with multisensory interactive installations to enhance bodily engagement among audiences (Garzotto et al., 2020; Vi et al., 2017). However, such research often positions the facilitation of understanding or the strengthening of empathy as its primary objective, rarely addressing the ethical potential of misunderstanding, discomfort, or ambiguity as foundational to sensory experience.

Against this backdrop, this study proposes an exhibition strategy grounded in difference, one that centres estrangement, untranslatability, and the audience’s hesitation or discomfort as key elements in constructing the relationship between artwork and viewer. In contrast to traditional inclusive models that seek to simplify or assimilate difference, this approach reflects Crip theory’s resistance to normative regimes of acceptance. More importantly, this curatorial implementation provides a direct and tangible critique of dominant perceptual logics and institutional systems of knowledge production. Rather than promoting immediate comprehension or categorisation, the exhibition prompts audiences to engage in reflection through the ambiguity and openness of sensory experience.

From this perspective, an “inclusive society” should not be conceived as a distributive model that simply “makes space” for the Other but reimagined as an ethical structure in which difference is allowed to persist, remain partially incomprehensible, and yet be respected. Inclusion, at its core, does

not lie in assimilating difference or rendering it easily intelligible but in recognising the epistemic value and social significance of asymmetry, incoherence, and uncertainty. The sensory-ethical practices illuminated through disability arts in this study constitute a critical response to this deeper reimagining of an inclusive society.

7.4 Rethinking Authorship, Collaboration, and Curatorial Ethics

This study, through four collaborative artistic practice projects, not only seeks to challenge the dominance of visually oriented creative paradigms but also focuses on the renegotiation of authorship and the power dynamics embedded in mechanisms of co-development. The authorship is no longer understood as an expression of individual ownership. Instead, it is conceived as a dynamic and relational process, one that is continuously negotiated, adapted, and situated within broader social structures and perceptual regimes. The co-development between artists with visual impairment and the researcher is not merely a matter of collaboration. This engagement involves an ongoing process of critical reflection and negotiation around questions of who speaks, how meaning is constructed, and who holds interpretive authority. This process, in turn, compels the researcher to continuously reflect on the researcher's own positionality within artistic creation, curatorial practice, and research intervention.

Differences in language interpretation, creative habits, and modes of expression constitute critical factors shaping the dynamics of collaboration. The researcher became increasingly aware of the influence of personal perceptual and epistemological conditioning throughout the co-creative process. Despite a committed adoption of non-visual strategies in curation, creation, and participation, long-term training within a visually dominant cultural framework continued to shape the researcher's

modes of perception and knowledge production. These influences manifested in specific practices, such as the pacing of creation, spatial imagination, and presentational logic. Importantly, such differences were not solely perceptual but also shaped by distinct cultural contexts and creative traditions.

For instance, in the improvisational music and dance projects, the researcher, whose practice was informed by a design-based approach, tended to rely on structurally prefigured and thematically driven frameworks. By contrast, the participating artists with visual impairment often attuned to spontaneous adjustments based on immediate sensory input and bodily rhythm. These differing orientations initially led to diverging expectations regarding the “completeness” of a work. However, through ongoing embodied interaction and dialogic engagement, a form of “practical mutuality” gradually emerged: one grounded not in language explanation but in perceptual coordination achieved through bodily attunement, material feedback, and rhythmic negotiation.

However, even when a degree of mutual understanding was achieved during the collaborative process, new power dynamics emerged in the curatorial stage. As the frameworks of exhibition and documentation were predominantly directed by the researcher, non-visual experiences were at risk of being unintentionally translated into visual terms of understanding. For example, in the non-visual photography project, several works were originally constructed through auditory and tactile. Yet, in the final exhibition, the captions and descriptive texts reframed these pieces through visual explanation, such as interpreting one image as “An old woman in Sunshine Studio is weaving straw bags (hand close-up)” (see Figure 38). This form of translation reinstated a visual paradigm of perception and diminished the original significance of the non-visual generative logic. Audience

feedback also revealed similar tensions: while many viewers reported an increased awareness of spatial and bodily difference, their understanding often remained anchored in visual frameworks.



Figure 38 This non-visual photography, taken by the researcher, was titled "An old woman in Sunshine Studio is weaving straw bags (hand close-up)."

A more pressing challenge lies in the researcher's ongoing negotiation between "intelligibility" and "perceptual freedom". In the curatorial process of installation art, for example, there was a dual imperative: on one hand, to open exploratory pathways for the audience; on the other, to resist the temptation of fully translating non-visual experiences into visual narratives, which risks undermining their sensory distinctiveness. This tension reveals the inherent ambivalence in curatorial power: despite the researcher's efforts to present the creative process equitably, the organisation of space,

interpretive framing of works, and the guidance offered to audiences inevitably involve acts of selection and interpretation.

This dilemma highlights a persistent challenge in disability art: how can sensory difference be affirmed without being subsumed into dominant perceptual regimes? The avoidance of such translation is not merely a technical concern but one of ethics and epistemology. It demands a deliberate curatorial shift, one that privileges tactile, auditory, and olfactory dimensions over explanatory visual overlays, and embraces non-visual sensory modes that may resist immediate comprehension. Fundamentally, this turn requires a willingness to allow non-visual knowledge systems to retain their partial obscurity, rejecting the imperative that all experience be rendered fully intelligible through visual norms.

In response to the gap between visually conditioned modes of knowledge construction and the embodied experience of artists with visual impairment, environmental affordance theory offers a practice-based framework for negotiating tensions in collaborative art-making. As proposed by Gibson (2015), the concept of *affordance* emphasises the mutually constitutive relationship between perception and action, understood not as the passive reception of information but as a dynamic structure of interaction between body and environment. When applied to co-creative practices in disability arts, affordance theory calls for the design of creative spaces without imposing fixed visual logics or interpretive tempos shaped by sighted researchers. This approach emphasises activating multisensory cues, such as tactile pathways, sonic delays, and olfactory flows, to construct an open-ended, explorable system. Within such a framework, each mode of perception can find a distinct point of entry and corresponding possibilities for engagement.

In collaborations with the improvisational dancer Mr. Su and the non-visual photographer Mr. Jiang, this affordance-oriented approach gradually supplanted the researcher's initial curatorial logic based on visual composition. For example, in the dance project, rather than predefining the performance structure visually, the initiation points and rhythmic sequences were determined by the direction of the wind, the texture of the ground, and auditory feedback within the space. Similarly, in the photography project, the researcher moved away from conventional standards of visual clarity and focal subject matter, instead foregrounding sensory flows, such as the movement of scent, sound layers, and tactile impressions, as generative triggers for photographic action. These spatial and sensory adaptations not only expanded the creative agency of artists with visual impairments but also prompted the sighted researcher to critically reassess normative expectations regarding artistic completeness and audience comprehension. In doing so, the curatorial and collaborative process was reoriented towards sensory plurality.

More significantly, the affordance-based configuration opened a space of "shared asymmetry" within the collaborative process. In this space, diverse perceptual modalities were not required to align with or be translated into dominant sensory paradigms; rather, mutual understanding was cultivated through harmonisation to each other's tempo, gestures, and responses. This approach not only alleviated tensions between differing creative logics but also restructured the distribution of perception itself, recognising that not all experiences should be verified by sight, nor all meanings clearly defined through language. Through the redesign and sharing of affordances, artistic practice became a negotiated, rather than unified, process, and the foundation of collaboration shifted from epistemic dominance to perceptual co-constitution.

In the context of curatorial practice, this perspective repositions the exhibition space not as a neutral container for content display, but as a generative site of meaning co-constructed through bodily interaction. Within such a field, the strategic deployment of affordances invites audiences to explore, question, and dwell through embodied engagement, rather than simply extract information through visual scanning. However, in practice, some visitors continued to rely heavily on visually structured interpretive cues. This tendency revealed not only the challenges involved in fostering genuine sensory collaboration but also the enduring influence of dominant perceptual regimes that continue to shape knowledge production within exhibition environments.

This curatorial approach led the researcher to relinquish the impulse to provide linear narratives or explanatory frameworks for audience consumption. Instead, the aim became to cultivate “unnamed” perceptual pathways. For instance, in the curatorial design of the installation artworks, a uniform mode of interaction was intentionally avoided. Instead, tactile engagement, affective sensation, and attentive listening were encouraged to occur in overlapping sequences, prompting each visitor to reconstruct the logic of interaction through their own embodied and lived experiences. Rather than asking audiences to “understand” the experience of visual impairment, this strategy invited them to participate in a collective generation of sensory order. Such an approach diverges from conventional accessibility design grounded in compensatory logic, where sensory substitution is used to approximate normative experience, and also departs from the universalist principles of clarity and legibility associated with standard inclusive design. In contrast, it promotes an open system in which meaning emerges through the interplay of diverse sensory pathways, preserving the ambiguity and

indeterminacy of embodied experience. Viewed through this lens, environmental affordance is not only a curatorial shift in method but also a reframing of epistemic authority in sensory perception.

In this sense, the reorientation of curatorial practice through environmental affordances can be understood as a point of convergence between Daoist perception and the de-ocularcentrism evident in disability arts. Both challenge the impulse to predetermine sensory engagement according to visual norms, instead fostering conditions in which perception unfolds naturally through unforced, multisensory attunement. This convergence indicates that dismantling ocularcentrism is not a matter of replacing one dominant sense with another but of reconstructing the ethical foundations by which sensory authority is distributed. Within this process, the Daoist principles of wu-wei and mutual responsiveness provide both a philosophical basis and a practical method for cultivating curatorial spaces that respect sensory plurality.

Taken together, this section contributes original insights in three key areas:

(1) The concept of co-development is reinterpreted as a continuously negotiated and enacted relational structure of perception, rather than a straightforward model of collaboration.

(2) By grounding the analysis in sensory practices, the study offers a systematic critique of the power dynamics embedded in curatorial processes, proposing the notion of “shared asymmetry” as a central paradigm for understanding co-creative practice.

(3) Drawing on the lens of affordance, the understanding of exhibition space is expanded, from a medium for transmitting visual information to a generative field for sensory collaboration and epistemic plurality.

At the intersection of theory and practices, this analysis directly responds to the research questions of this study:

- RQ 3: How can the dual perspectives of the participant-researcher, as collaborator, co-developer, and curator, and the artists with visual impairment be integrated into creative practice as research?
- RQ 4: How do the multi-media and multisensory artistic practices of artists with visual impairment shape audience understandings of culture, art, and disability?

By critically engaging with creative tensions, audience interpretive structures, and the spatial organisation of exhibitions, this research proposes a reframing of authorship and interpretability. This reframing challenges entrenched visual and epistemic hierarchies, positioning multisensory curation as a domain with its own creative and theoretical authority. The framework developed through this research provides both a conceptual paradigm and a practical methodology for curators, artists, and researchers committed to sustaining plurality in sensory experience. This framework demonstrates that artistic collaboration can operate as both a method of creation and a profound reorganisation of how perception, knowledge, and participation are understood.

7.5 Methodological Contribution and Theoretical Innovation

This research makes a methodological contribution through the development of an axiologically grounded transdisciplinary framework that systematically responds to key challenges in contemporary disability art practice, namely, sensory diversity, ethical collaboration, and knowledge co-production. In contrast, some studies in disability arts research have adhered to a single theoretical paradigm, such as a purely phenomenological lens (Starr & Smith, 2023; Worthington & Sextou, 2024)

or an exclusively disability-related approach (Bhogal-Nair et al., 2024). Such singular framings can limit the capacity to address the layered interplay of sensory, cultural, and creative dynamics. The methodological design in this research is instead led by an axiological orientation, foregrounding values of inclusivity, reflexivity, and epistemic plurality as the guiding principles of inquiry. Rooted in this axiological orientation, all phases of the research process, from collaborative creation to data collection, analysis, and curatorial practice, are shaped by these principles. As a result, research is positioned as a relational and embodied inquiry into the intersections of sensory experience, cultural difference, and artistic expression.

More specifically, the methodological integration developed in Chapter 3 brings together four key theoretical strands: phenomenology's emphasis on embodied perception and embodied difference, CDS's critique of the reductive binary between the medical and social models of disability, Crip theory's revaluation of non-normative sensory modalities and non-linear temporalities, and Daoist concepts such as *wu-wei* and *guishen*, which inform this research's perceptual ethics by emphasising intuitive responsiveness, bodily attunement, and the acceptance of differences. These frameworks are not statically juxtaposed but, rather, dynamically generated through ongoing negotiation and transdisciplinary dialogue across multisensory collaboration, cross-cultural exhibition, and reflexive practice. Together, these intersecting perspectives constitute the methodological foundations of this research.

Crucially, the study moves beyond the conventional binary between researcher and research subject, towards a co-creative and co-developmental approach to knowledge production. The researcher actively inhabited multiple positionalities (researcher, practitioner, and curator) working

alongside artists with visual impairment to explore the experiential and expressive potentials of non-visual perception. This transdisciplinary and reflexive method not only expands the theoretical space of disability arts research but also offers empirical grounding for rethinking disability aesthetics, sensory ethics, and social participation in culturally situated terms.

The methodological innovations of this research lie in its axiological foundations for integrating methodologies, the deep embedding of embodied and sensory ethics, and the enactment of co-constructive knowledge practices through embodied artistic engagement. This framework departs from conventional approaches in both art research and Disability Studies by emphasising the co-development, plurality, and generativity of knowledge production. It also foregrounds a distinct ethical orientation, marked by respect for embodied difference, critical attention to power dynamics in collaboration, and the affirmation of non-normative modes of expression. More concretely, the study establishes an embodied and ethically attuned platform for cross-disciplinary dialogue between perceptual philosophy, disability art practice, and sociocultural critique, thereby contributing a methodological foundation for more inclusive forms of artistic research and knowledge-making.

This research is significant because it provides a transferable methodological model for integrating sensory ethics, collaborative equity, and cultural responsiveness into disability arts research. The relevance extends to inclusive curation, arts education, and policy-making, offering practical pathways for embedding multisensory and cross-cultural approaches in wider artistic and institutional contexts. While the methodological framework offers a platform for advancing disability arts research, it also exposes the inherent challenges of working across multiple disciplines, sensory modalities, and cultural contexts. Recognising these challenges is essential for refining the applicability

and transferability of the framework. The following section therefore considers the limitations of this study and identifies potential directions for further research.

7.6 Limitations and Future Directions

7.6.1 Limitations

Despite the important theoretical and practical contributions proposed by this research, several limitations remain. First, the sample size was limited. Due to the low level of social participation among the disabled population in China, the number of artists with disabilities was limited, and artists with visual impairment were particularly underrepresented. As a result, only a small number of artists with visual impairment were able to participate in this research, which constrained the generalisability of the findings. Second, the research methodology primarily relied on qualitative approaches, with limited incorporation of broader quantitative verification. This methodological focus restricted the wider applicability and scalability of the research results. In addition, the study concentrated exclusively on artists with visual impairment and did not include other groups of artists with disability. Consequently, the artistic experiences of people with hearing impairment, physical disabilities, or neurodivergence were not addressed.

Interpretation of data collected in cross-cultural contexts involved challenges stemming from cultural differences and contextual understanding, which may have affected the clarity and consistency of the conclusions. Although this research achieved certain outcomes in terms of theoretical construction and practical exploration, several limitations should be acknowledged and addressed in future work.

Specifically, first, the restricted number of participants had an impact on the generalisability of the research. In the Chinese context, public visibility and social participation of disabled communities remain limited. The population of artists with visual impairment is particularly small, which led to a small sample size. This limitation affected the representativeness and transferability of the findings, especially with regard to the diversity of visual impairment types and artistic practices.

Moreover, the research focused primarily on artists with visual impairment and did not engage with other disability communities, including those with hearing impairments, physical disabilities, or neurodivergent experiences. The diversity within disability arts and the intersections between different disability types have not yet been fully explored. The current study therefore concentrated on theoretical and practical aspects of non-visual sensory modalities and did not encompass a broader spectrum of disability arts.

Additionally, the cross-cultural comparison attempted to present different understandings and receptions of disability arts within Chinese and New Zealand contexts. However, difficulties in interpretation and the risk of cultural misreading remained. Divergences in cultural values, limitations of language expression, and differences in social systems may have influenced the stability and clarity of the research conclusions.

These limitations do not diminish the theoretical contribution or practical significance of the research. Rather, they point towards directions for future work, including expanding the participant pool, involving diverse disability groups, and deepening cross-cultural theoretical analyses to further enhance the understanding and support of disability arts.

7.6.2 Future Research

Diversification of research participants is expected to further enrich the pathways of multisensory artistic practice. Future studies may expand to include a broader range of disabled groups, such as people with hearing impairments, individuals with physical disabilities, people on the autism spectrum, and neurodivergent populations. Each type of disability contains unique perceptual mechanisms and expressive modes that may generate new creative logics and sensory interaction methods in artistic practice. In-depth investigation of these groups may contribute to breaking the dominance of a single disability paradigm and constructing a more complex and multidimensional picture of disability arts, deepening understanding of creative models and artistic subjectivity across diverse disability experiences.

Secondly, future research may focus on the potential of non-visual art within the fields of art therapy and disability health. Beyond this study, the researcher collaborated with the blind community in New Zealand and worked together with professional therapists from Waikato Hospital to implement an African drumming therapy project aimed at individuals with visual impairment experiencing mild depression. The project received positive feedback. This practical initiative provided empirical support for the application of non-visual art in medical and clinical intervention, demonstrating the unique role of non-visual senses in physical and mental regulation. Future research may systematically examine the multiple functions of non-visual sensory engagement in artistic intervention, especially the mechanisms involved in stimulating bodily perception, regulating affections, reconstructing the agency and embodied experience of people with disabilities. This research direction not only broadens the social function of disability arts but also offers theoretical

support and strategic guidance for multisensory and cross-cultural development within the field of arts-based therapy. Such an approach may advance transdisciplinary integration of the arts into public health and disability support systems.

Additionally, based on the findings of this study in the field of multisensory artistic creation and exhibition experience, future research may aim to promote reform in inclusive arts education curriculum design and evaluation systems. While current art education and assessment frameworks still tend to prioritise visual abilities, there is a growing recognition of the role of non-visual senses in artistic creation and experience. Future development may involve more diverse teaching mechanisms and assessment tools that incorporate touch, hearing, and spatial perception as central components of arts education, supporting equitable participation among students with different sensory modalities and expressive styles. These mechanisms may offer feasible pathways and institutional references for promoting equity and inclusivity in global arts education and contribute to paradigm shifts in educational practice.

In conclusion, future research should continue to expand the boundaries of disability arts across theoretical, practical, and institutional dimensions, promoting renewed societal recognition of creative capacity, multisensory perception, and artistic value in disability contexts. These efforts may contribute to laying a solid foundation for building a more open, diverse, and equitable cultural and artistic ecology. These directions are not isolated extensions but continuations of the axiologically grounded, transdisciplinary approach developed in this study. Methodologically, this research establishes a transferable and adaptable model for integrating sensory ethics, collaborative equity, and cultural responsiveness into disability arts practice. By embedding sensory ethics, collaborative

equity, and cultural responsiveness into future work, disability arts research can further challenge normative paradigms and foster more generative forms of artistic and social participation.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This concluding chapter synthesises the key findings of this research, which investigated the sensory, cultural, and collaborative dimensions of non-visual art practice by artists with visual impairment and the researcher in China and New Zealand. Grounded in an axiological framework that integrates phenomenology, CDS, Crip theory, and Daoism, the study demonstrates how embodied creative practice challenges dominant visual-centric paradigms and generates unique forms of inclusive and ethical knowledge-making. The artistic forms of the non-visual art collaborative practices centred on non-visual sensory modalities, including non-visual photography, improvised music, improvised dance, and installation art. A mixed-method analytical framework was employed, comprising qualitative methods such as IPA and RTA as well as the quantitative method through DSA, to systematically examine the collected data. This journey also transformed the researcher's own understanding, from initial assumptions about the limits of visually impaired artists' practices to a deeper appreciation of their creative agency, aesthetic innovation, and capacity to reshape the ethics of perception. This transformation, from tentative curiosity about what artists might achieve, to a deep understanding of how and why the artists create, and what the art practices reveal about perception, has been integral to the research's contribution.

The research examined how artists with visual impairment engaged tactile, auditory, spatial, and embodied perception in the process of artistic expression and creation through multisensory interaction. Further attention was given to how such processes contributed to meaning-making and place-making, while generating affective and visceral experiences. These findings reveal the distinctive

perceptual mechanisms and expressive pathways through which artists with visual impairment create art beyond the reliance on sight.

The study highlighted the necessity for intentional multisensory communication and collaborative practice between artists with visual impairment and the researcher in creative settings that decentre visual interpretation. This mode of collaboration between visually impaired and sighted practitioners enabled both parties to engage more deeply with, and reflect on, the embodied differences, facilitating the co-construction of aesthetic languages and creative strategies beyond visual-centric paradigms. The findings demonstrated the potential for co-development between individuals with and without disabilities in artistic practice, providing both theoretical insight and practical guidance for fostering more inclusive, pluralistic, and equitable artistic environments.

The researcher, positioned across multiple roles as academic, art practitioner, and curator, observed, recorded, and analysed the creative processes of disability art from multiple perspectives. Through long-term collaborative engagement, the study examined how embodied differences were manifested in practice as well as how diverse sensory experiences were negotiated, integrated, and contested within the creative process, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics involved in multisensory artistic collaborative practice.

In addition, four exhibitions and accompanying audience surveys conducted in China and New Zealand supported a cross-cultural analysis of perceptual and attitudinal shifts regarding disability, art, and multisensory experience before and after audience participation. These findings contributed to a more nuanced and context-sensitive perspective on the development and public reception of disability aesthetic.

Specifically, the primary findings of this study can be summarised under three key dimensions:

(1) Reconstructing disability perspectives

The study demonstrated that artists with visual impairment exhibited creative potential and subjectivity that surpassed the conventional stereotypes imposed by mainstream society. This finding challenged the persistent bias and misconception that people with disabilities are only capable of engaging in socially prescribed or narrowly defined activities. The artistic practices of the artists with visual impairment were not presented as inspirational narratives of overcoming barriers or transcending deficits. Rather, they vividly illustrated how individuals with visual impairment engaged in artistic expression through tactile, auditory, and spatial perception, creating profound and innovative works beyond the dominant visual mode of perception. This shift in perspective resonated with the principles of CDS and Crip theory, which advocate for the celebration of disability. The findings reconstructed public perceptions of creative capacity and subjectivity among disabled communities and contributed to the movement away from the binary opposition between the medical model and the social model, towards a more multidimensional and flexible social paradigm. Through this transition, disability was no longer perceived as a deficit requiring cure or compensation but was recognised as a rich, unique, and creative form of embodied experience and cultural expression. The study expanded the understanding of the potential and value of disability arts in contemporary society.

(2) Non-visual art versus visual-centric norms

The non-visual artistic approaches adopted by the artists with visual impairment successfully questioned and challenged the visual supremacy embedded in conventional artistic practices. The findings indicated that tactile, auditory, and spatial perception were not merely compensatory tools

for the absence of vision but fundamental sensory elements with distinct aesthetic logic and intrinsic value in the artistic process. For example, Mr. Jiang and Ms. Xiao constructed complex photographic images by integrating auditory and tactile cues with imagination in non-visual photography. Mr. Su explored the dynamic relationship between embodied perception and environmental affordances in improvisational dance, developing a unique sensory pathway through body-space interaction. Mr. Wang demonstrated heightened sensitivity to material texture in installation art, while Mr. Kong's improvisational music practice showed precise auditory memory and the fusion of multi-layered sound. These practices affirmed the central role of non-visual senses in creative expression. The multisensory creation model not only effectively deconstructed the limitations of vision-dominated artistic methods but also expanded the theoretical framework of sensory aesthetics. The study provided a more inclusive and multidimensional foundation for future artistic practices.

(3) Disability arts in cross-cultural settings

This research did not begin with a predefined agenda of "cross-cultural comparison". Rather, the cross-cultural dimension emerged contingently, shaped by the researcher's transnational lived and creative experiences and by the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated collaborative practices across China and New Zealand. This cultural divergence did not serve as the central focus of the research but instead provided a contextual ground through which the relationship between perception, ethics, and creative practice could be tested and expanded across distinct cultural settings. In this sense, the cross-cultural aspect functions as an opportunistic methodological extension, providing insight into the contingency and variability of sensory-ethical relations.

The research revealed, through cross-cultural comparison of exhibitions held in China and New Zealand, the significant influence of cultural background on disability art practices, public acceptance, and audience interaction. In the Chinese exhibition, audiences tended to interpret the artworks of artists with visual impairment through affective or inspirational narratives, viewing the artistic achievements as overcoming obstacles or transcending limitations. This interpretive pattern reflected the ongoing influence of traditional medical models and moralised discourses within Chinese understandings of disability. In contrast, audiences in the New Zealand exhibitions approached the work from perspectives of social participation, diversity of expression, and individual rights. They focused on the potential of disability art in areas such as art therapy, mental health, and inclusive education, showing stronger critical awareness and social engagement.

This cultural contrast highlighted the diversity and complexity of disability discourses across different sociocultural contexts. The findings suggested that advancing global disability arts and inclusion should involve a grounded understanding of local cultural values and social structures. The ways in which disability is conceptualised within each culture shaped not only the topics and methods of artistic creation but also influenced curatorial strategies, modes of audience engagement, and dominant imaginaries of disability and ability. Cross-cultural comparison expanded the theoretical horizon of the study and provided a valuable empirical basis for the development of global disability arts initiatives, educational practices, and policy-making. This perspective facilitated the formation of localised, multidimensional, and inclusive artistic trajectories within diverse cultural settings.

Notably, the impact of the collaborative art practices in this research has continued beyond the scope of the study. For example, building on the installation art project developed in this research,

artist Mr. Wang initiated a new project with his collaborators to further explore tactile and spatial interaction, demonstrating the sustained generative impact of the co-creative framework. Such developments demonstrate that this research functioned not only as a site of shared creation but also as a catalyst for sustained artistic initiatives and mutual growth. This unique human adventure, in which artistic discoveries, methodological innovations, and personal growth were jointly owned, continues to generate new creative work well beyond the project period.

In closing, this research positions disability arts not merely as a site of creative expression but as a transformative arena for rethinking the ethics of perception and the politics of collaboration. By foregrounding non-visual modalities, it challenges entrenched visual hierarchies and offers an alternative aesthetic grounded in embodied difference and multisensory engagement. The integration of phenomenology, CDS, Crip theory, and Daoist philosophy within lived artistic processes demonstrates the generative potential of transdisciplinary dialogue.

This study's unique contribution lies in developing an axiologically grounded, co-creative framework that reinterprets non-visual artistic practice as both a methodological approach and a form of intervention in disability arts. The research is significant because it evidences how sustained collaborative practice can transform artistic agency, reframe curatorial ethics, and generate knowledge that is co-owned by artists, audiences, and the researcher. It offers potential application in inclusive exhibition design, arts education, disability arts policy, and multisensory creative practice, providing a transferable model for embedding sensory ethics, collaborative equity, and responsiveness to diverse contexts. While the projects are situated in specific cultural and temporal contexts, their implications extend beyond these boundaries, opening a sustained conversation about

how the creative practices of artists with disability can shape more inclusive and equitable futures. Parallels can be seen in the growing international momentum towards multisensory and participatory exhibition design (Bruno, 2025), the rise of disability-led arts festivals that challenge normative norms (Walters, 2023), and the increasing use of collaborative curatorial models that redistribute authorship and privilege non-visual sensory engagement (Fotiadi, 2024).

The findings of this study also align with broader international efforts, as reflected in the aims of the United Nations CRPD. These efforts seek to deepen public understanding of disability and promote genuine inclusion in all areas of social life. By centring non-visual and multisensory practices, the research challenges the reductive binary between the medical and social models of disability, advocating instead for an approach grounded in human rights, active participation, and respect for difference. In doing so, it demonstrates how collaborative artistic practice can operate as both a creative methodology and an ethical intervention, enabling environments where persons with disabilities are recognised as active agents in shaping inclusive and equitable societies. The creative and ethical possibilities illuminated here form a call for artists, curators, researchers, and communities to reimagine how embodied sensory differences can become a generative force in building more pluralistic futures.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Appendix B: Research Information Sheet

Appendix C: Consent Forms

Appendix D: Questions for Semi-structured Interview

Appendix E: Survey (English and Chinese versions)

Appendix F: Recruitment Posters

Appendix G: Exhibition Materials and Layouts in the Exhibitions

The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
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Hamilton, New Zealand

Human Research Ethics Committee
Roger Moltzen
Telephone: +64021658119
Email: humanethics@waikato.ac.nz



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

15 February 2022

Yuan Ma
School of Arts
ALPSS
By email: ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz

Dear Yuan Ma

HREC(Health)2022#02 : Creative practice as research: exploring the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China

Thank you for your responses to the Committee feedback.

We are now pleased to provide formal approval for your project.

Please contact the Committee by email (humanethics@waikato.ac.nz) if you wish to make changes to your project as it unfolds, quoting your application number with your future correspondence. Any minor changes or additions to the approved research activities can be handled outside the monthly application cycle.

We wish you all the best with your research.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RM' followed by a flourish.

Emeritus Professor Roger Moltzen MNZM
Chairperson
University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
DIVISION OF ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Participant Information Sheet-Collaborative practice & Interview

Researcher: Yuan Ma

Project Title:

Creative practice as research: Exploring the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China

The invitation:

My name is Yuan Ma. I am a PhD student at The University of Waikato, New Zealand. I am conducting research on the creative practice and sensory world of visually impaired art practitioners in China. As part of my research, I would like to invite you to participate in a collaborative creative project with me, learn from your experience and discuss your thoughts about your creative practice and sensations while making your art.

About the research:

Senses play a pivotal role in stimulating inspiration, creation, and public art appreciation. Despite living in a highly visual environment, our perception of the world is a rich multisensory experience. The aim of the research is to explore links between creative practices and cultural perspectives on perception and disability, as well as giving a voice to visually impaired artists.

Collaboration and Interview sessions will be audio-taped with the consent of the participants and will be transcribed for research purposes.

Details of the participation:

1. About your rights:

- You can ask questions about the research at any time during your participation.
- You do not have to answer questions unless you are happy to talk about the topic.
- You can stop the interviews at any time, and you can ask to have the recording device turned off at any time.
- Your identity will remain confidential in the presentation of the research findings if you do not want to be identified.
- When the project is concluded, you will receive an Executive Summary of the research and will be given access to the full research thesis if you request it.

2. About the outcomes of this research:

- There will be public exhibitions of the work you create in China and New Zealand. You will retain full copyright of the creative work produced for this research.
- A thesis and journal articles.
- Public presentations in academic contexts.
- The information about the research outcomes (online media video) will be published on social media (Weibo/Xiaohongshu/Facebook), this will include the audio report, a link to the thesis and

the executive summary. All written materials apart from the thesis will also be produced and made available in braille.

3. As a participant, the things you need to do:

- Collaborate with the researcher through creative practice. This will take up to 10 hours per month for up to 9 months of your time.
- Be interviewed by the researcher during the creative collaboration work, share and discuss your ideas on creativity, art, culture and vision impairment/disability.
- Co-develop your stories of your creative work and processes with the researcher
- Provide your actual name in the research unless you request otherwise.

4. Withdrawing from the research project:

You can withdraw from the project at any time 3 weeks after completion of data collection (the last process of data collection will be the exhibition).

If you wish to withdraw before the completion of data collection, you need to inform the researcher 1 month prior to the set-up of the exhibition.

5. About the storage of the collected information:

- Research data will be stored for a minimum of 5 years after the completion of this research.
- The data will be stored online in my student google account, as well as my supervisors' Google Waikato drives.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this research possible.

If you have any queries or wish to know more, please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Yuan Ma

Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences

The University of Waikato

Email: ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz

Cell: 086-15105552108

This research project has been approved by the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee HREC(Health)2022#02#. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email humanethics@waikato.ac.nz

怀卡托大学
艺术，法律，心理学和社会科学学院

研究信息-合作项目及访谈

研究者：马远

项目名称：

基于创意实践的研究:探索中国视障艺术家的感官世界

邀请：

我叫马远。我是怀卡托大学艺术、法律和社会科学系的博士生。我正在中国进行视觉障碍者感官世界的创造性实践研究。作为我研究的一部分，我想邀请您参加合作项目和访谈，与我一起体验在中国的合作实践，分享和讨论您的想法。

关于研究：

感官在激发灵感、创造和公共艺术欣赏方面起着关键作用，尽管生活在一个高度视觉化的环境中，我们对世界的感知是一种丰富的多感官体验。这项研究的目的是探索在感知和残障方面创造性实践和文化视角之间的联系，并为残障艺术家发声。

合作和访谈环节将在参与者同意的情况下进行录音，并进行转录，用于研究目的。

参与详情：

1. 关于您的权利：

- 在参与过程中，您可以随时就研究提出更多问题。
- 除非您乐于谈论这个话题，否则您可以不必回答问题。
- 您可以随时停止采访，也可以随时要求关闭录音设备。
- 如果您不想被公开，您的身份将在展示研究结果时保密。
- 项目结束后，您将收到我们最终报告的摘要，如果您要求，您将获得完整报告的访问权限。

2. 关于本研究的结果：

- 在中国和新西兰的将公共展览您的作品。您将保留本研究创作作品的全部版权。
- 论文和期刊文章。
- 学术背景下的公开演讲。
- 研究成果信息（在线媒体视频）将以音频报告、论文链接和执行摘要的形式发布在社交媒体（微博/小红书/Facebook）上，所有的书面材料会配以盲文制作。

3. 作为一名参与者，您需要做的事情：

- 与研究人员合作进行创造性实践，时间为每月最多 10 个小时，持续最多 9 个月。
- 在创意合作实践期间进行访谈，分享并讨论您对创意、艺术、文化和视障/残障的看法。

- 与研究人员共同开发您关于创意工作过程的故事，这些故事将在合作实践之前开发记录。
 - 在研究中提供您的真实姓名，除非您另有要求。
4. 关于退出项目的情况：
您可以在数据收集完成后 3 周退出项目（数据收集的最后一个流程是展览），如果您想在数据收集完成前退出，您需要提前 1 个月通知研究人员。
5. 关于收集信息的存储：
- 研究数据将在本研究完成后至少保存 5 年。
 - 数据将在线存储在我的学生谷歌账户以及我导师的谷歌（怀卡托大学）硬盘中。

非常感谢您给予的时间和帮助，使这项研究成为可能。
如果您有任何疑问或希望了解更多的信息，请和我联系。

祝 好
马 远

艺术、法律、心理和社会科学部
怀卡托大学
Email: ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz
Phone: +86 15105552108

该研究项目已获得怀卡托大学人类研究伦理委员会 (Health) 2022#02# 的批准。关于本研究的道德行为的任何问题都可以发送给委员会秘书，电子邮件 humanethics@waikato.ac.nz。

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
DIVISION OF ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Participant Information Sheet-Survey

Researcher: Yuan Ma

Project Title:

Creative practice as research: exploring the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China

The invitation:

My name is Yuan Ma. I'm a PhD student at The University of Waikato of Arts, Law & Social Sciences. I am conducting research on creative practice and the sensory world of visually impaired people in China. As part of my research, I would like to invite you to participate in a survey, share and discuss your thoughts on the exhibition that has been co-developed in this research in China and is being exhibited in China and New Zealand.

About the exhibition:

Senses play a pivotal role in stimulating inspiration, creation, and reception of artifacts. Despite living in a highly visual environment, our perception of the world is a rich multi-sensory experience. The impairment of vision could lead to changes of the sensory, as well as cognitive, habits. This creative practice is a collaborative project, which is jointly created by visually impaired people and non-visually impaired people. It aims to explore creative possibilities for art and different perspectives on perception and creativity as well as human voice to visually impaired artists.

Details of the participation:

1. About your rights:

- You can only answer the questions that you want to answer in the survey.
- You can ask further questions about the research at the end of the survey.
- You can withdraw your participation at any time by not completing the survey.

2. About the outcomes of this research:

- A thesis and journal articles.
- Public presentations in academic contexts.
- The information about the research outcomes (online media video) will be published on social media (Weibo/Xiaohongshu/Facebook), this will include the audio report, a link to the thesis and the executive summary. All written materials apart from the thesis will also be produced and made available in braille.

3. As a participant, the things you need to do:

- Answer the questions in the survey about your ideas on creativity, art, culture and vision impairment/disability when you engage with the exhibition.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this research possible.
If you have any queries or wish to know more, please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Yuan Ma

Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences

The University of Waikato

Email: ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz

Cell: 086-15105552108

This research project has been approved by the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee HREC(Health)2022#02#. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email humanethics@waikato.ac.nz

怀卡托大学
艺术，法律，心理学和社会科学学院

研究信息-调查

研究者：马远

项目名称：

基于创意实践的研究:探索中国视障艺术家的感官世界

邀请：

我叫马远。我是怀卡托大学艺术、法律和社会科学系的博士生。我正在中国进行视觉障碍者感官世界的创造性实践研究。作为我研究的一部分，我想邀请您参加一项调查，分享和讨论您对本次展览的看法。本次展览是在中国共同开发的，在中国和新西兰展出。

关于展览：

感官在激发灵感、创造和公共艺术欣赏方面起着关键作用，尽管生活在一个高度视觉化的环境中，我们对世界的感知是一种丰富的多感官体验。这项研究的目的是探索在感知和残障方面创造性实践和文化视角之间的联系，并为残障艺术家发声。

问卷调查环节将在平板或者 app 里以单页或者 H5 的形式出现，并进行转录，用于研究目的。

参与详情：

1. 关于您的权利：

- 您可以只回答您想在调研中回答的问题。
- 在调查的最后，您可以就研究提出更多问题。
- 您可以随时放弃回答调研的问题以撤出参与。

2. 关于本研究的结果：

- 论文和期刊文章。
- 学术背景下的公开演讲。
- 研究成果信息（在线媒体视频）将以音频报告、论文链接和执行摘要的形式发布在社交媒体（微博/小红书/Facebook）上，所有的书面材料会配以盲文制作。

3. 作为一名参与者，您需要做的事情：

- 在展览期间，回答调查中关于您对创意、艺术、文化和视障/残障的看法的问题。

非常感谢您给予的时间和帮助，使这项研究成为可能。
如果您有任何疑问或希望了解更多的信息，请和我联系：
祝 好
马远
艺术、法律、心理和社会科学部
怀卡托大学
Email: ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz
Phone: +86 15105552108

该研究项目已获得怀卡托大学人类研究伦理委员会 (Health) 2022#02# 的批准。关于本研究的道德行为的任何问题都可以发送给委员会秘书，电子邮件 humanethics@waikato.ac.nz。

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
DIVISION OF ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - Collaborative practice & Interview

[A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant]

Researcher: Yuan Ma
ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH

Creative practice as research: exploring the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China

Name of person participating: _____

I have received a copy of the Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction.

About the collaborative practice and the interview:

I understand that I will collaborate with the researcher on creative practice. This will take up 10 hours per month for up to 9 months.

I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at any time during my participation.

I understand that I will be interviewed by the researcher during the creative collaboration work, sharing and discussing my ideas on creativeness, art, culture and vision impairment/disability.

I understand that I do not have to answer questions unless I am happy to talk about the topic. I can stop the interview at any time, and I can ask to have the recording device turned off at any time.

I understand that I will co-develop my stories of my creative work and processes with the researcher.

I understand that my actual name will be used in the research findings unless I request otherwise.

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time 3 weeks after completion of data collection (the last process of data collection will be the exhibition). If I wish to withdraw before the completion of data collection, I need to inform the researcher 1 month prior to the set-up of the exhibition.

I understand, when the project is concluded, I will receive an Executive Summary of the research and the transcript of my interview, and understand that I will be given access to the full research thesis if I request it.

I understand I will not receive any sort of payment.

I understand my participation is volunteer.

I understand I will have copyright of the art/creative work I develop in the research.

When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my interview, and creative practice (if appropriate) but I give consent for the researcher to use the material for the purposes of the research outlined in the Information Sheet.

Participant :

Researcher:

Signature :

Signature :

Date :

Date :

Contact Details:

Contact Details:

This research project has been approved by the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee HREC(Health)2022#02#. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email humanethics@waikato.ac.nz

怀卡托大学
艺术，法律，心理学和社会科学学院

参加者同意书 – 合作实践及访谈
[研究人员和参与者均应保留本表的完整副本]

研究者：马远
ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz

研究课题：
基于创意实践的研究：探索中国视障艺术家的感官世界

被访者姓名： _____

我已经收到一份描述研究项目的文档，我提出的任何与研究有关的问题都得到了满意的回答。

关于合作项目和访谈：

我知道，我将与研究人员共同进行创造性实践，实践做多每月 10 个小时，持续最多 9 个月。

我知道，我可以在参与研究期间的任何时候提出有关研究的进一步问题。

我知道，我将在合作项目工作期间接受访谈，分享和讨论我对创造力、艺术、文化和视障的看法。

我知道，除非我乐意谈论这个话题，否则我可以不必回答问题。我可以随时停止采访，也可以随时要求关闭录音设备。

我知道，我将与研究人员共同开发关于我创作性工作和过程的故事。

我知道，除非我另有要求，否则我的真实姓名将用于研究。

我知道，我可以在数据收集完成 3 周后退出该项目（数据收集的最后一个过程将是展览）。如果我希望在数据收集完成前退出，我需要在展览开始前一个月通知研究人员。

我知道，当项目结束时，我将收到最终报告的执行摘要和采访记录，并理解我将根据要求获得完整的研究论文。

我知道我不会收到任何形式的报酬。

我知道我的参与是自愿的。

我知道，我将拥有我在研究中开发的艺术/创意作品的版权。

当我签署本同意书时，我将保留访谈和创意实践（如果有）的所有权，但我同意研究人员将访谈内容用于信息表中概述的研究目的。

参与者:	_____	研究者:	_____
签名:	_____	签名:	_____
日期:	_____	日期:	_____
联系方式:	_____	联系方式:	_____
	_____		_____
	_____		_____

该研究项目已获得怀卡托大学人类研究伦理委员会(Health)2022#02#的批准。关于本研究的道德行为的任何问题都可以发送给委员会秘书，电子邮件 humanethics@waikato.ac.nz。

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
DIVISION OF ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - Survey

[A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant]

Researcher: Yuan Ma
ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH

Creative practice as research: exploring the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China

Name of person participated: _____

I have received a copy of the Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction.

About the survey:

I understand that I can only answer the questions that I want to answer in the survey.

I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at the end of the survey.

I understand that I can withdraw my participation at any time by not completing the survey.

I understand that I will not receive any sort of payment.

I understand that my participation is volunteer.

I understand that the result of the survey will be published on the official platform of the exhibition.

When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my survey, but I give consent for the researcher to use the survey for the purposes of the research outlined in the Information Sheet.

Participant :	_____	Researcher:	_____
Signature :	_____	Signature :	_____
Date :	_____	Date :	_____
Contact Details:	_____	Contact Details:	_____
	_____		_____
	_____		_____

This research project has been approved by the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee HREC(Health)2022#02#. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email humanethics@waikato.ac.nz

怀卡托大学
艺术，法律，心理学和社会科学学院

参与者同意书 – 问卷调查

[研究人员和参与者均应保留本表的完整副本]

研究者：马远

ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz

研究课题：

基于创意实践的研究：探索中国视障艺术家的感官世界

参与者姓名： _____

我已经收到一份描述研究项目的文档，我提出的任何与研究有关的问题都得到了满意的回答。

关于调查：

我知道，我可以只回答问题中我想回答的部分。

我知道，我可以在调查结束时进一步询问有关研究的问题。

我知道，我可以通过不完成调查来撤出我的参与。

我知道我不会收到任何形式的报酬。

我知道我的参与是自愿的。

我知道，问卷调查的结果将会公布在展览的官方平台上。

当我签署本同意书时，我将保留问卷调查的所有权，但我同意研究人员将访谈内容用于信息表中概述的研究目的。

参与者：

研究者：

签名：

签名：

日期：

日期：

联系方式：

联系方式：

该研究项目已获得怀卡托大学人类研究伦理委员会(Health)2022#02#的批准。关于本研究的道德行为的任何问题都可以发送给委员会秘书，电子邮件 humanethics@waikato.ac.nz。

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DIVISION OF ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Questions for semi-structured interview with vision impaired creative practitioners

Researcher: Yuan Ma

ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH

Creative practice as research: exploring the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China

General questions:

1. Can I ask about your vision level now?
2. Are you born with visual impairment or because of some diseases?
3. Tell me a little bit of your life.
4. Why did your family have you perform on stage as a blind musician from such a young age?
(specifically for the musician)
5. Do you use a white cane or any mobility aids when you go out?

About multi-sensory abilities:

6. Do you have some images or imaginations in your mind when you create?
7. If appropriate, which sensations are you aware the most in your daily life?
8. If appropriate, which sensations are you aware the most during your creative process?
9. Do you use the sense of smell during your creation?
10. Which sensory do you rely on most in your life and creation?
11. How do you feel the environment around you, especially when you create?
12. You mentioned to scan by using touch, how?
13. Do specific textures trigger certain emotional responses or memories for you?
14. How do you feel about the external world using your body, especially when you create?

About creative process and multi-media experience:

15. Which art field and practice are you focusing on?
16. What art practice have you done before?
17. When you create, do you need help? If so what kind of help?
18. Compared to creating on your own, what differences do you notice in collaborative creation?
19. How do you find your inspiration?
20. What is your own understanding or interpretation to the collaborative practice in this research?
21. What kind of role do you think art plays in your life?
22. How do you control your body senses to create artwork?
23. Do you categorise your material before or during creative process? (specifically for the installation artist)
24. Can you share why and how you decide on these materials?
25. How do you manage these subtle tactile variations in your creations?

26. What are the different steps in the creative process that you take to develop the outcome that you are aiming for?
27. What does “multi-media” mean to you?
28. Have you ever thought about the new media in your creation, like using videos or AI (artificial intelligence)? Will there be any impact in your life or creation?
29. Do you think that using multi-media is helpful in your creative process?
30. What is your own interpretation to “improvisation”? In your creative process, does it affect you? (specifically for the musician and the dancer)
31. When you danced with me, were there any associations leading you to do the next step?
32. How do you interact with your partners?
33. When you create improvisational works, do you truly make no preparations or plans at all?
34. Is there a process of finding your direction (on stage)?
35. Have you ever had experiences composing music, or do you just play from sheet music? (specifically for the musician)
36. I wonder if you have any experience in reading music, do you use the blind music notation or something else? (specifically for the musician)
37. In terms of music, do you also deal with some multimedia elements? (specifically for the musician)
38. When you’re learning software, because there are many buttons, do these buttons make sounds to indicate their function, or how do you use them? (specifically for the musician)
39. How do you compose the images and consider the positioning of the device? (specifically for the photographer)
40. Some blind individuals believe that non-visual photography is still a visual phenomenon. What are your thoughts on this? (specifically for the photographer)
41. You mentioned smell by using the example of the connection between flowers and pleasant feelings. Does this evoke memory or perception in your creative process? (specifically for the photographer)
42. You mentioned that when photographing wind chimes, you first asked me to listen before determining the direction. Do you often use sound in this way in your practice? (specifically for the photographer)
43. How do you usually express emotions, by communicating with the family, or expressing through any media channels?

About Disability:

44. Do you think that visual impairment is a form of disability?
45. What does “disability” mean to you?
46. What is your own interpretation of “equality” and “normalcy”?
47. Do you use the word disability to identify yourself?
48. After encountering discussions within the community about the different Chinese terms for “disability,” what do you think?
49. What do you think about the accessibility service for the people with disability in China/ UK/ USA, especially for people with visual impairment?
50. What do you think “long-term blindness” and “sudden blindness”?
51. Do you experience any unfair treatment in your daily life?
52. There are official measurements and definition of visual impairment in China and other countries. Do you agree with these and the threshold of vision that could be regarded as a disability?

53. Do you use Braille? Is it useful to you? What does it mean to you?
54. After entering university, are there any textbooks or exam papers presented in Braille? (specifically for the photographer)
55. Is Braille the same for English and Chinese?
56. Do congenitally blind individuals become more proficient when exposed to this language, or is it easier for the people who become blind later in life to engage with it?
57. Do you have any experience with audio descriptions before?
58. What do you think about audio descriptions, like audio-described movies?
59. Do you think our current level of audio descriptions in China can meet the entertainment needs of people with visual impairment?
60. Do you have a guide dog? Are there any specific policies or regulations related to owning a guide dog?

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What do you think of this exhibition?

- Perfect
- Good
- Generally
- Still needs improvement (Please rate)

2. What do you think is the most impressive part of this exhibition?

- Multi-sensory experience
- Multi-media application
- Accessibility for people with disabilities
- The process of creative practices
- Others (Please rate)

3. During the exhibition, which senses did you use?

- Vision
- Sense of touch
- Hearing
- Taste
- Combination
- Others (Please rate)

4. Do you know any visually impaired people?

- No, I don't know.
- Yes, I know some.
- Other (Please rate)

5. How do you rate about your eyesight?

- Very good
- Good
- Average
- Not too good
- Damaged
- Totally blind

6. Do you consider yourself as an art practitioner with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

7. What's the feelings did you have in this exhibition?

8. Imagine with your eyes closed, which senses you most used to perceive your surroundings: hearing, touch, smell, taste. Please fill in the order of feeling.

9. Do you have imagination in your mind when using senses other than sight? If so, what kind of imagination?

10. What is your own definition of disability?

11. Do you think you have a disability in your life?

12. How do you interpret the term "blind"?

13. Have you ever participated in an exhibition organised/curated by an artist with a disability?

14. If you are a creative worker, do you think this exhibition is meaningful to you? Is it relevant to your own practice?

15. Are you member of an organisation involved in arts or disability? If so, what is it?

16. What do you think of the accessibility service for the people with disability in New Zealand?

17. What do you think your city (New Zealand) has done in terms of accessibility service for visually impaired people?

18. How do you perceive the prevalence of Braille in New Zealand?

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low
- Not Sure

19. Have you ever seen Braille products in your life?

- Yes, frequently
- Yes, occasionally
- No, never
- Not sure

20. Do you have any other questions?

关于“与视障艺术家合作及展览”的问卷调查

导言：感官在刺激灵感、创造和接受艺术品方面起着关键作用。尽管我们生活在一个高度视觉化的环境中，我们对世界的感知是一种丰富的多感官体验，视力受损可能导致感官和认知习惯的改变，那这种改变会带给我们什么呢？

请注意：在您填写这份问卷之前，请知悉参与者同意书，并在问卷结尾点击同意并提交。内容如下：研究者：马远 ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz 研究课题：基于创意实践的研究:探索中国视障艺术家的感官世界 我已经知悉研究项目的具体描述，我提出的任何与研究有关的问题都得到了满意的回答。关于调查：我知道，我可以只回答问题中我想回答的部分。我知道，我可以在调查结束时进一步询问有关研究的问题。我知道，我可以通过不完成调查来撤出我的参与。我知道我不会收到任何形式的报酬。我知道我的参与是自愿的。我知道，问卷调查的结果将会公布在展览的官方平台上。当我签署本同意书时，我将保留问卷调查的所有权，但我同意研究人员将访谈内容用于信息表中概述的研究目的。

您觉得这次展览如何？ *

- 完美
- 挺好
- 一般
- 还需要改进（请评价） ____

展览中的哪一个方面您最喜欢？ *

- 多感官体验
- 多媒体应用
- 残疾人无障碍部分
- 其他 ____

在展览中，您使用了哪些感官 [多选题] *

- 视觉
- 触觉
- 听觉
- 味觉
- 感觉
- 组合
- 其他____

您认识一些视障者嘛? *

- 不认识
- 是的，我认识一些
- 可能

您觉得您的视力如何? *

- 非常好
- 好
- 平均水平
- 不太好
- 受损
- 全盲

您的名字/昵称 *

您的年龄是 *

- 18–25
- 26–35
- 36–55
- 56–65
- 66岁以上

您觉得自己是有障碍艺术实践者嘛? *

- 不是
- 是____

您的职业是 *

您觉得这次展览中，对您印象最深刻的部分是什么? *

设想把眼睛闭起来，您会用哪几种感官来感受周围环境：听觉，触觉，嗅觉，味觉，感觉。请按照感受顺序进行填写。 *

您在使用除视觉以外的感官时，脑海中会有想象吗？如果有，会有什么样的想象呢？ *

您觉得“残障”是什么？ *

您觉得自己在生活中有残障状态嘛？ *

您参加过由残疾艺术家组织/策划的展览吗？ *

如果您是创意工作者，您觉得这个展览对您有意义吗？和您自己的实践有关联性吗？ *

您是某艺术组织的成员吗? *

您如何看待中国的残疾人无障碍设施? *

针对中国视力受损人群的无障碍设施, 您觉得您的城市在这方面做的如何? *

请问您还有什么其他的问题吗? *

我的邮箱是ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz, 如果想进一步交流, 请留下您的联系方式, 谢谢! *

Multi-sensory

Visual impaired

Collaboration

JOIN ME ON COLLABORATIVE ► CREATIVE JOURNEY

Multi-media

Creativity

Living with Disability

Imagination

Experience

RECRUITE COLLABORATORS

► Audio

Do you want to have a **voice** on
art, disability and social life?

Please **join** me

If you think that you are **visually impaired**
&
have **creative experience** in audio and/or
visual media



CONTACT ME!

Yuan Ma

WeChat:
mauyan19

Email:
ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz



多感官

视障

合作

加入我! 来一场 合作 创作之旅

多/新媒体

创意

残疾

体验

想象

招募合作者 ▶ 语音

您想对**艺术、残疾和社会生活发声**吗?

如果您觉得自己是**视障人群**
&
在**音频/视频媒体有创作经验!**

加入我!



请联系我!

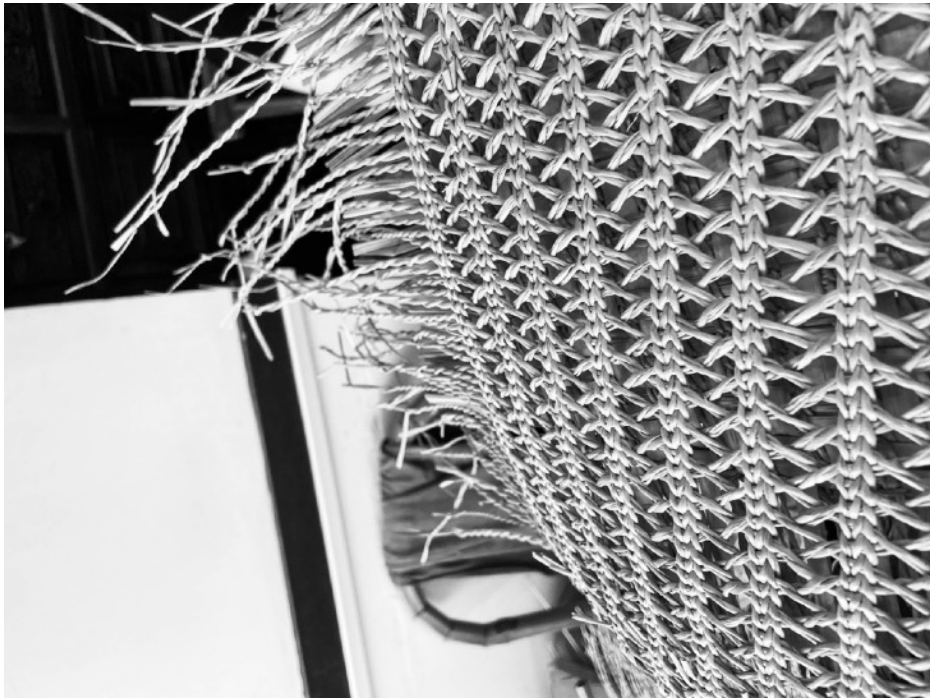
马远

微信:
mauyan19

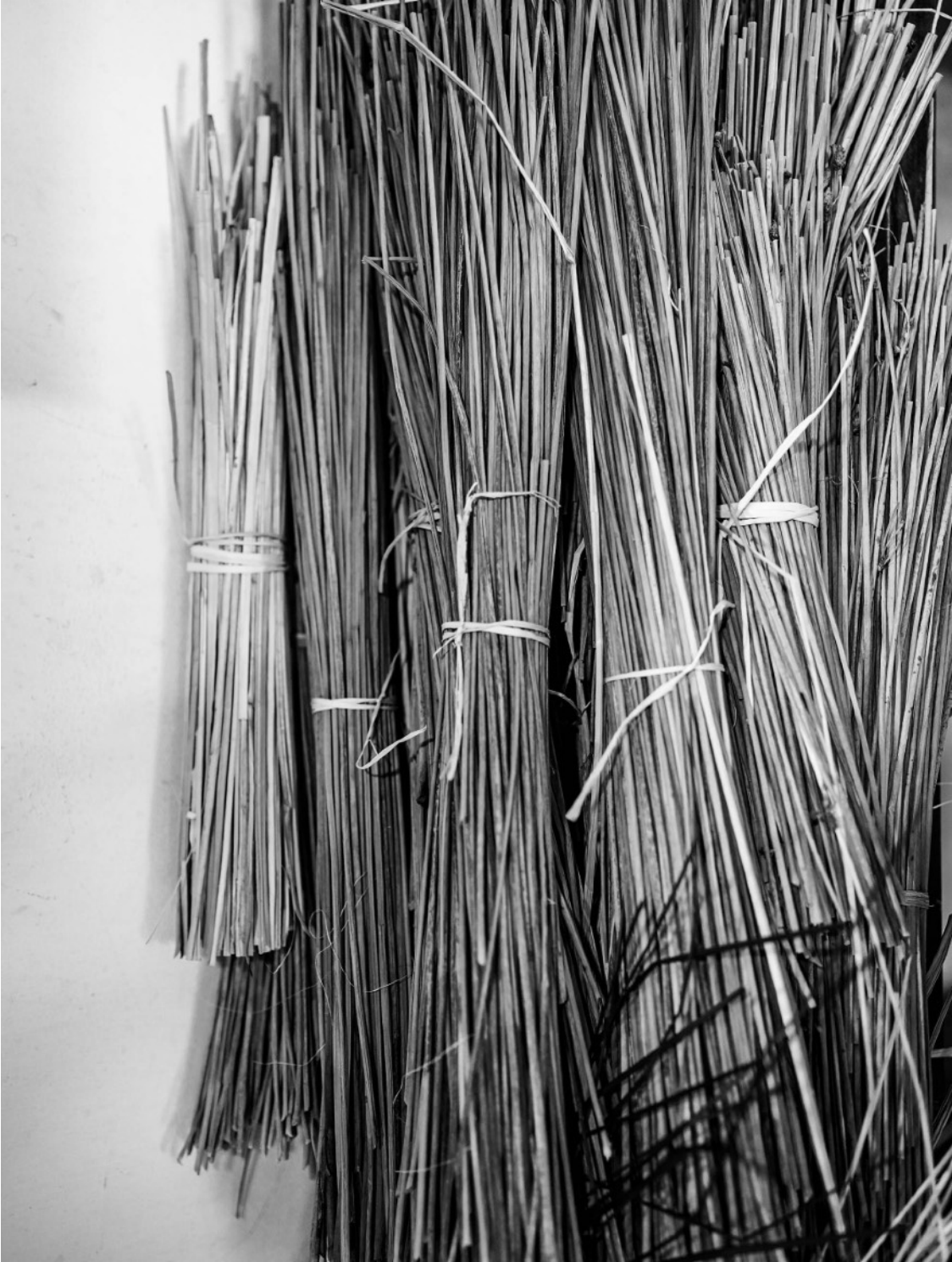
邮箱:
ym250@students.waikato.ac.nz

Photography - Project One: Non-visual photography - "Sunshine Workshop"





These three photographs were all taken by Mr. Jiang, the photographer with visual impairment.

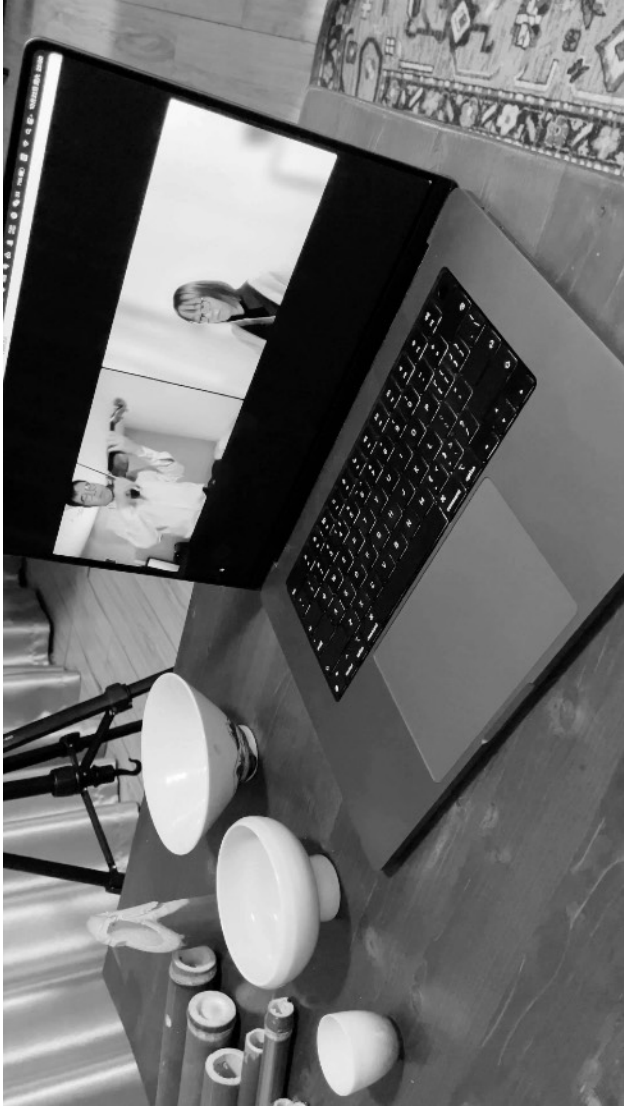


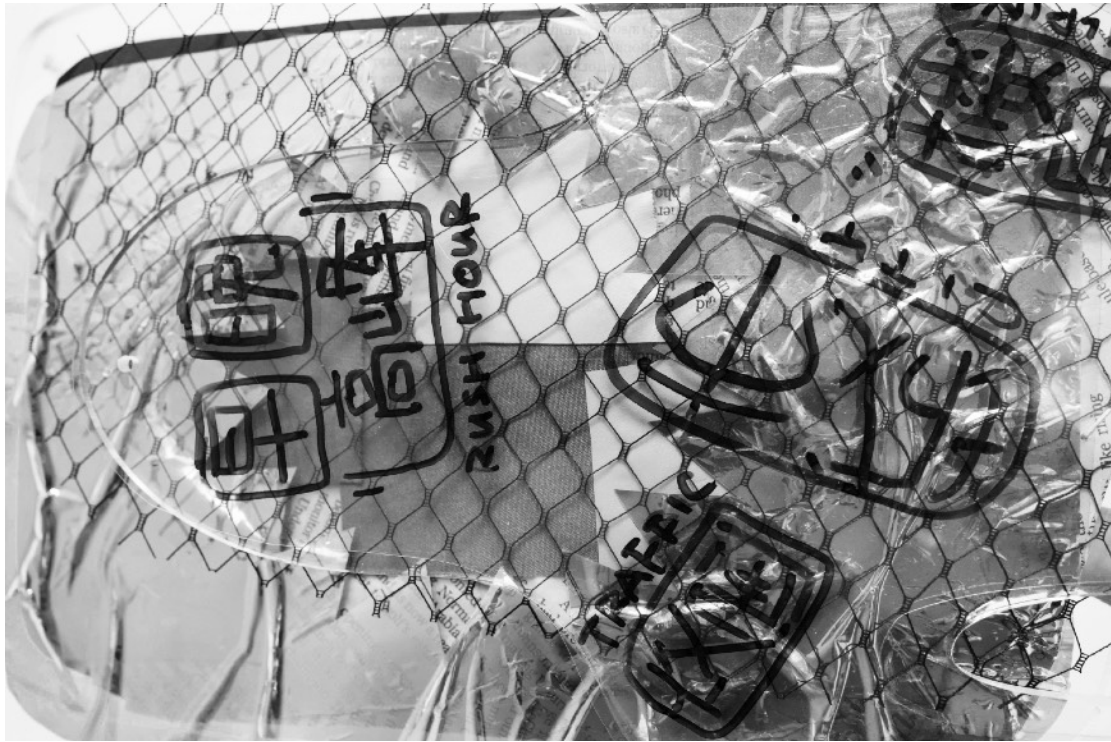
Photography - Project Two: Impromptu dance - "Time"



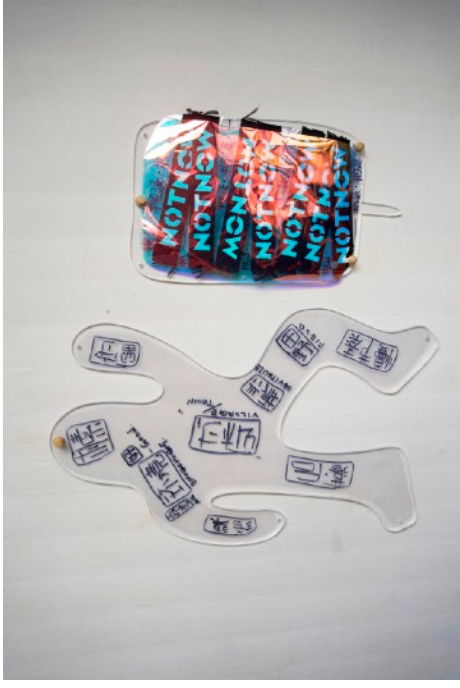
Photography - Project Three: Improvisational music - "At Present"





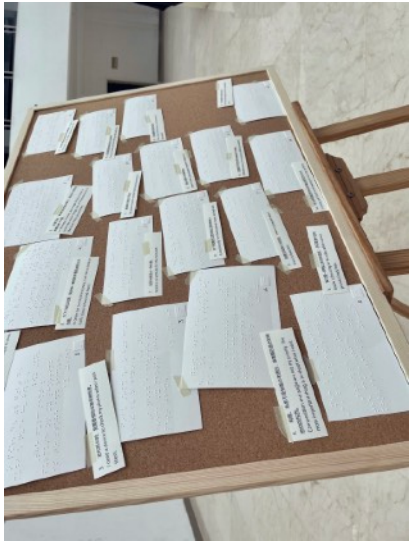


Photography - Project Four: Installation art - "My XXX"



Exhibition view at the Maanshan University, Anhui, China



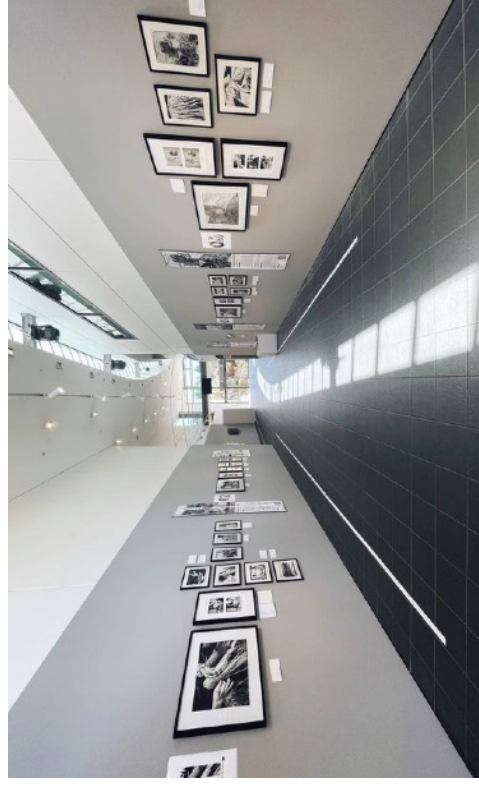


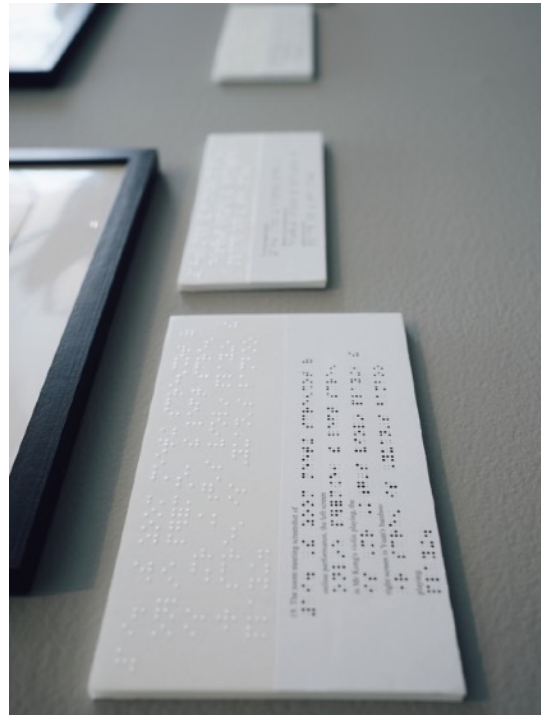


Audience engagement in the exhibition in China



Exhibition view at Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts at the University of Waikato





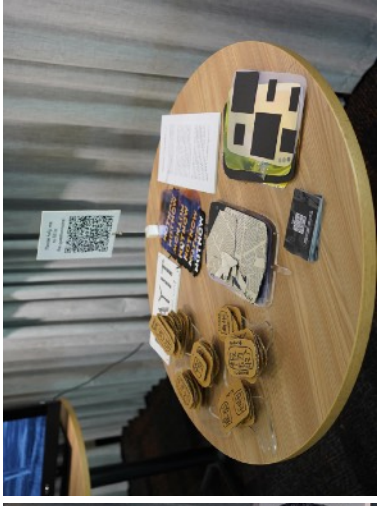
Exhibition view in the Meteor Theatre in Hamilton







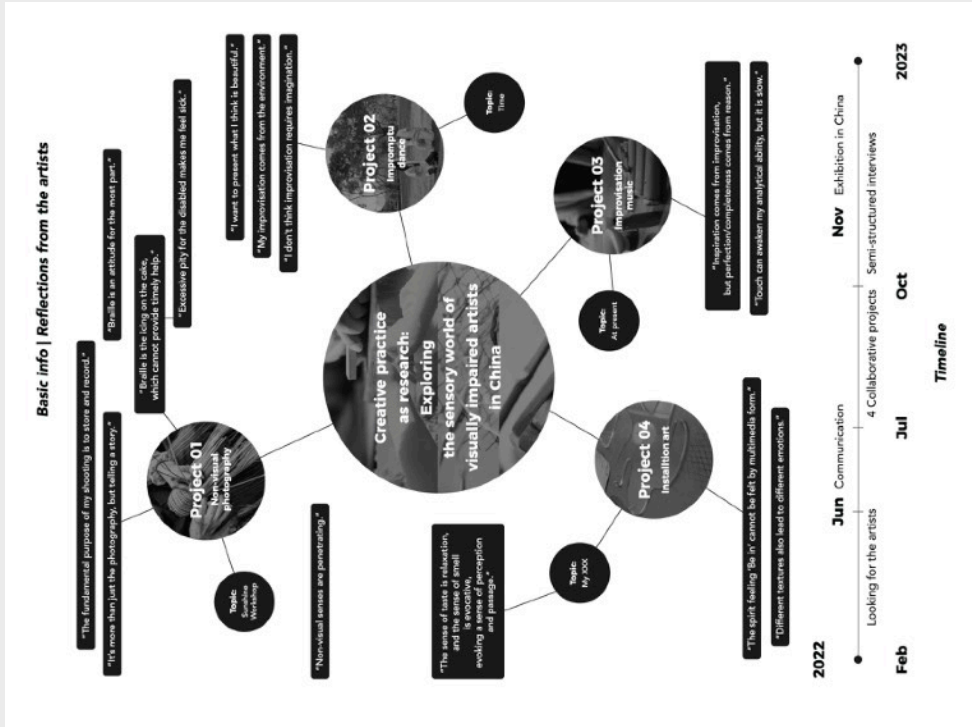
Exhibition view in the School of Design at the University of Waikato



Audience engagement in the exhibitions in New Zealand



Banner and Posters



Exploring the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China

Introduction

Since Jing is a visual artist, it is creating, sensation, cognition, and recognition of artists. Details being a highly visual environment, our perception of the world is a rich and sensory experience. As a performer of blind or low-vision artists, we have a unique perspective on the world. We are interested in exploring the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China. We will explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses. We will also explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses.

Project info: Creative practice + Exhibition

This project constitutes MY YUAN's doctoral research, accompanying four collaborative art practices and four exhibitions, one in China and three in New Zealand. The exhibition 'Engines' seems to advocate the potential of practice and to look for the artists' perspective.

Exhibition info

China: 13/11/2022 - 20/11/2022 in Nanjing, Anhui, China

New Zealand: 18/03/2024 - 24/03/2024 at the Faculty of Performing Arts at the University of Waikato
23/04/2024 - 27/04/2024 in Auckland, New Zealand
30/04/2024 - 05/05/2024 in S. Frank Project 19/2024 at the University of Waikato

QR code

FEEDBACK Questionnaire

Feedback QR code

Feedback QR code



Cooperative project 01

Introduction

This is an interdisciplinary collaborative project by MY JING and MY YUAN. It explores the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China. We will explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses. We will also explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses.

Non-visual photography

This project explores the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China. We will explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses. We will also explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses.

QR code

FEEDBACK Questionnaire

Feedback QR code



Cooperative project 02

Introduction

This is an interdisciplinary collaborative project by MY JING and MY YUAN. It explores the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China. We will explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses. We will also explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses.

Improvisational dance

This project explores the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China. We will explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses. We will also explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses.

QR code

FEEDBACK Questionnaire

Feedback QR code



Cooperative project 03

Introduction

This is an interdisciplinary collaborative project by MY JING and MY YUAN. It explores the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China. We will explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses. We will also explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses.

Improvisation music

This project explores the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China. We will explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses. We will also explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses.

QR code

FEEDBACK Questionnaire

Feedback QR code



Cooperative project 04

Introduction

This is an interdisciplinary collaborative project by MY JING and MY YUAN. It explores the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China. We will explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses. We will also explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses.

Installation art

This project explores the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China. We will explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses. We will also explore their creative practice and how they experience the world through their senses.

QR code

FEEDBACK Questionnaire

Feedback QR code

Posters



Exploring the sensory world of visually impaired artists in China

探索中国视障艺术家的感官世界

Introduction

Some play a second role in creating accessible digital and print resources for people with visual impairments. They are the artists who create art that is accessible to people with visual impairments. This exhibition project is created by Ma Yuan and four Chinese visually impaired artists. It is a project to explore the sensory world of visually impaired artists.

China + New Zealand

Ma Yuan and four Chinese visually impaired artists will be invited to New Zealand to participate in the exhibition project. The project is a collaboration between the University of Waikato and the Creative Practices Centre.

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Questions
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