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Art-Reach, The Arthur Ross Gallery, Encourage Patrons to Touch Rodin Sculptures During Exclusive Touch Tour.

Patrons with low vision or blindness toured the collection, touching various works along the way.

PHILADELPHIA (December 16, 2013) – Art-Reach, a Philadelphia-based arts accessibility non-profit, announces today a recent fully accessible engagement of *Auguste Rodin: The Human Experience. Selections from the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Collections*. This “touch tour,” the first of its kind to be hosted by the Arthur Ross Gallery, welcomed hands-on interaction with four original Rodin sculptures, by visitors from Associated Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Pennsylvania (ASB).

The offering of this rare opportunity is part of a budding partnership between Art-Reach and the Arthur Ross Gallery, and the former’s continuing efforts to increase disability awareness and training at cultural venues throughout the region. Earlier in 2013, Art-Reach Associate Director Stephanie Borton met with Gallery Director Lynn Marsden-Atlass, to discuss the services Art-Reach could provide to make this special exhibition, and similar ones in the future, more accessible. When asked if a sensory tour for people who have varied sightedness would be possible, Marsden-Atlass responded it was “not a question of if, but when.”

After a series of training and planning sessions, Borton, Art-Reach Program Manager Nicole Oidick, and Gallery volunteers, welcomed a group of seven individuals from ASB to the University City space. The 60 minute session on December 12th included a guided tour of the twenty-piece exhibition during which sighted docents provided detailed audio description of said works, and encouraged the rare opportunity to physically touch four of the pieces. Trish Maunder, a volunteer and regularly practicing sighted guide, recently launched similar, more regular programming at the Arthur Ross Gallery’s sister institution, the UPenn Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, where she is employed. While museums in many major cities do offer similar services, Philadelphia has recently been recognized for this work.

In 2014, Art-Reach aims to continue their efforts to make the arts more accessible to all people, by equipping the staff of local cultural institutions, like the Arthur Ross Gallery, with the skills needed to accommodate the needs of more diverse audiences. Borton explained, “For 27 years, [Art-Reach has] connected underserved audiences to the arts, and last year alone we served 17,931 individuals with disabilities or economic disadvantages. That’s a lot of people who are, hopefully, receiving the same, high-quality experience as their sighted, or fully abled, or economically stable counterparts do.” She went on to explain the organization’s goal: “to, of course, continue diversifying audiences, but to also make every effort to ensure that their cultural experiences are just as engaging.”

Photos by Brian Young

- 1) Members of ASB touch a small Rodin figure.
- 2) Members of ASB touch a larger portrait sculpture by Rodin.
- 3) Members of ASB touch a Rodin figure, this time without gloves.

About Art Reach: Art-Reach is a Philadelphia based non-profit established in 1986 to make the arts of our region more accessible to people that lack access to our cultural organizations because of a disability, economic disadvantage, or other adversity. Through ticketed live arts events, on-site workshops, and a



fine art placement program, Art-Reach empowers over 17,000 traditionally under-served individuals, of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to creatively participate in their communities, every year. For more information about how to get involved with or support Art-Reach, visit www.art-reach.org

About the Arthur Ross Gallery: Serving as a rich cultural resource for students, scholars and the community, the Arthur Ross Gallery of the University of Pennsylvania presents global art and artifacts through gallery exhibitions, scholarship and educational outreach. Auguste Rodin: The Human Experience. Selections from the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Collections is open to the public until December 22, 2013. For gallery hours and information, visit www.upenn.edu/ARG/

About the Associated Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Pennsylvania: ASB is a private, non-profit organization created to inspire self-esteem, independence and self-determination in people who are blind or visually impaired. ASB provides support through education, training and resources, as well as through community action and public education. To learn more about ASB services, visit www.asb.org

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