

The project undertakes critical reflection on museum audio description, i.e. verbal representation of works of art aimed at the blind and visually impaired. We intend to identify original strategies for describing selected styles/works of art and possibly compare them with the strategies of poets and composers who drew inspiration from the same styles/works of art, but were not constrained by institutional guidelines which audio describers need to observe.

Audio description (AD) makes it possible for visually impaired people to access films, television programmes or exhibitions, but – as a new technique – it has only recently become the subject of scientific research. Some theorists see it as a form of technical writing based on the principles of objectivity and unambiguous description. They argue that the target audiences wish to form their own opinion about the artworks. Others see it as a form of verbal art and claim that it consists of "translating" the experience of a painting into speech.

In our project, we take the latter view. We believe that description for the visually impaired is worth interpreting as verbal art, an extension of the long tradition of artistic (musical, literary) references to painting, which used a different medium to evoke a similar experience as their visual source. Although AD performs primarily informative and only secondarily aesthetic functions, even within the constraints of an informational text, its authors can use language in such a way as to "show" and not just "explain" a work of art.

We claim that AD could, within its own genre conventions, draw on musical and literary works based on painting in its linguistic imagery layer (by using analogous composition to that of the work of art, or synaesthetic metaphors that express the visual experience in terms of other relevant sensory experiences, for example, taste, smell or touch, as in the popular expressions concerning "warm", "muted" colours or "sharp" contrasts) and in its aural layer (for example, by bringing together speech sounds that evoke specific associations, by means of tempo, rhythm, loudness, dis/continuity, intonation, pitch and timbre of voice, or by the use of background music). Such descriptions, apart from "explaining" the work of art, may resemble it in some respects. We hypothesise that, depending on the strategy selected by their authors, the descriptions may either come close or move away from the painterly original on conceptual and aesthetic levels, evoking either similar or divergent emotional and sensory experiences. Thus, ADs may feel like an explanation of the painting or its translation into another form of expression.

To verify our hypotheses, we will gather examples of Polish and English-language ADs, made available on museum websites, to see if the authors take advantage of the aforementioned opportunities of language use within the accepted conventions of the genre. We will focus on works belonging to selected historical art movements: Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Abstract Art and Surrealism. Since each of them was based on different philosophical and aesthetic premises, we expect that they will prompt different strategies of description, which we wish to explore.

The analysis of AD will proceed in two phases, and the various descriptions will be considered in parallel with other forms of artistic expression selected for comparison. Among the latter, we will inspect literary and musical pieces, which were created at the same time as the works described or drew comparable inspirations and express similar ideas by means of language and music (to better understand musical and visual resonances, we will discuss, amongst others, the following relationships: Monet and Manet – Debussy and Ravel; Munch, Schiele, Kokoschka and Marc – Schoenberg, Berg and Webern; Picasso and Braque – Satie; Mondrian, Kandinsky and Klee – Boulez, Stockhausen and Schuller; Dalí and Miró – Varèse, Antheil, and early examples of Schaeffer's *musique concrète*). But we will also look for texts of culture that intentionally "translate" a particular artwork into sounds (of speech or music), and are not audio descriptions (e.g., Anne Sexton's poem *Starry Night* and Henri Dutilleul's musical piece *Timbres, espace, mouvement*, both inspired by Vincent van Gogh's famous painting).

Against this background, we will subject the collected museum ADs to textual and acoustic analysis, attempting to assess their degree of "similarity" to the visual source, understood as the activation of analogous cognitive and aesthetic experiences. In our textual analysis, we will refer to cognitive poetics, while in building analogies with painting and music, we will apply the tools of social semiotics, useful in explaining the "grammar" of visual and acoustic communication. We will then acoustically analyse the AD recordings in terms of the aforementioned prosodic features of expression and the associations they arouse to see if/how the sound layer corresponds to the painting style/a given work of art. We will present our research findings in the form of a monograph, as well as scientific articles and conference presentations.