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**THE
VALUE OF
TOUCH**



www.wendydaws.co.uk

MEDIA RELEASE
21 July 2016

More than just Touchy-Feely at the Guildhall Museum

There is a feast for the senses to come at the Guildhall Museum later this year as an innovative new arts project begins in earnest this month. Designed to unlock the hidden treasures of the museum collection to people with sight loss and other sensory disorders, it will leave a lasting tactile legacy for visitors of all ages and abilities to enjoy.

The Value of Touch, a participatory arts project funded by the Arts Council of England, Medway Council, NKLAAP, and the Kent Association for the Blind, and masterminded by Medway artist Wendy Daws, brings a community of Medway residents into the museum for a series of object handling and creative workshops. Participants of the Kent Association for the Blind (KAB) Medway Art group come from all walks of life, and are all ages, but they have one thing in common: full or partial sight loss.

Over a period of 12 workshops the group will experience, through their hands, parts of the collection which are otherwise only available to see, and then make a series of artworks in response to what they have felt and experienced through the sessions. These sessions will be run by Wendy and the Guildhall's Collections Officer, Steve Nye, and will take place in the Guildhall Museum itself, exploring the groups interest in memory and interpretation through touch.

Following these sessions Wendy is sharing an authentic makers studio experience with the art group who will take up a 2 month residency at Sun Pier House in Chatham. Here, they will hone and refine their ideas and the finished pieces will be curated into an exhibition running at the Guildhall from Nov 2016 - April 2017. This gives the participants an opportunity to celebrate their creativity with the general public, who in turn will be able to share their experiences through the work they have made.

Katherine Barr, the KAB Head of Client Services says of the project *"As well as bringing great enjoyment and new opportunities to the sight impaired members of the art group, the project will raise awareness of sight loss and the achievements of visually impaired people. It is also a great opportunity to highlight how art can be made accessible for people with disabilities. As part of the project, KAB looks forward to providing awareness training to the museum, which will be a long lasting legacy, helping staff to provide an brilliant experience for visually impaired visitors"*





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Ever mindful of the importance of accessibility for all, Wendy will also create a series of low relief tactile interpretations of the new artworks which will be displayed on the ground floor of the museum, thus ensuring that the exhibition experience is also open to those limited by a mobility impairment.

Additionally, over the 5 Wednesdays of the summer holidays, Wendy will be running drop-in family workshops with Christopher Sacre, another Medway based artist who is himself deaf. Accompanying them will be a BSL interpreter. These are aimed at all families and those who have members with hearing loss, and means that for the first time the Guildhall is able to offer creative workshops with professional artists to families who are otherwise excluded due to their disabilities. This work is funded specifically as a legacy of the North Kent Local Authority Arts Partnership (Gravesham and Medway Council's), whose purpose is to develop opportunities for wider community engagement in the arts, expanding on incredible work Wendy has been doing with visually impaired artists in Gravesend.

Working in partnership with the Kent Association for the Blind for many years, Wendy has an established track record of innovating many successful and award-winning creative projects throughout the museums of Kent, dispelling the myths surrounding blindness and the ability to work creatively in a visual medium. She is passionate about a person's ability to make and appreciate art, and has built a reputation for innovating creative solutions for overcoming barriers to access for people who may otherwise struggle to express themselves creatively. The KAB Medway Art Group was set up by her as a voluntary effort and has now been running for nearly 10 years.

Barbara Brigden, one of the longest serving members of the art group says *"I speak for the group that we are looking forward to exploring the museum and to be part of this project, its so great to meet with like minds and share experiences with others in similar circumstances. This gives us an opportunity to learn and we're never too old to learn, I'm 93 years young this year and I'm not the oldest student in our group!"*

This wonderful series of opportunities for the participants as well as the public would not be possible without the generous support of Arts Council England who have given a significant financial contribution, as well as KAB, NKLAAP and Medway Council whose joint funding has enabled this project to go ahead.

Simon Lace, Heritage Services Manager at the Guildhall, *"We are delighted that Wendy Daws and her team from the Kent Association for the Blind have received funding from Arts Council England to work with our collection at the Guildhall Museum. We're really excited about the prospect of a fantastic collaboration"*





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All museums have a legal requirement to maintain access standards across their buildings and collections but in some historical contexts their ability to do so remains limited. Projects such as these are vital, not only to be able to ensure that the hidden gems of the Guildhall's collection can be experienced by everyone, but to help break some of the social and cultural myths surrounding any disability and a persons physical ability to be creative.

ENDS

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

Wendy Daws and the KAB Medway Art Group won the EPIC award in 2015 for their work on Graffiti at Rochester Cathedral

<http://blog.epicawards.co.uk/2015/05/2015-epic-award-winners-announced/>

Wendy Daws studied at the University of Brighton, her dissertation 'The Value of Touch – Blind Alphabet C and Museum Approaches to the Visually Impaired Visitor' is central to her art practice. As a volunteer with the Kent Association for the Blind she established the KAB Medway Art Group in 2006 and KAB Gravesend Art Group in 2015. To keep up to date with the art group visit their blog kabmedwayartgroup.wordpress.com or Facebook page facebook.com/KABmedwayartgroup. www.wendydaws.co.uk

Kent Association for the Blind has been supporting visually impaired people in the local area for over 95 years. The charity provides a comprehensive service which is tailored to the needs of the individual. We support people of all ages from toddlers who are learning to use a white cane to safely navigate around their nursery to teenagers who want to learn cooking skills in anticipation of going to university. Our Assistive Technology Workers show people how to use specially adapted software so they can remain in employment or use computers to check email and access the internet. Across the region we have 40 social and leisure clubs as well as regular children's activity days. Our talking news service is distributed to hundreds of people every week, free of charge, ensuring that our clients remain an active part of their community.

For more information on the work of KAB visit www.kab.org.uk or contact Amy Van der Weide – Fundraising Manager: amy.vdw@kab.org.uk tel: 01622 691357

Photos Attached: Credit Wendy Daws

