

**REBECCA DUCLOS, Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts, Concordia University**

Bonjour tout le monde et bienvenue au Concordia.

Hello everyone – and thank you, David, for inviting me to welcome this august and highly sensorial group.

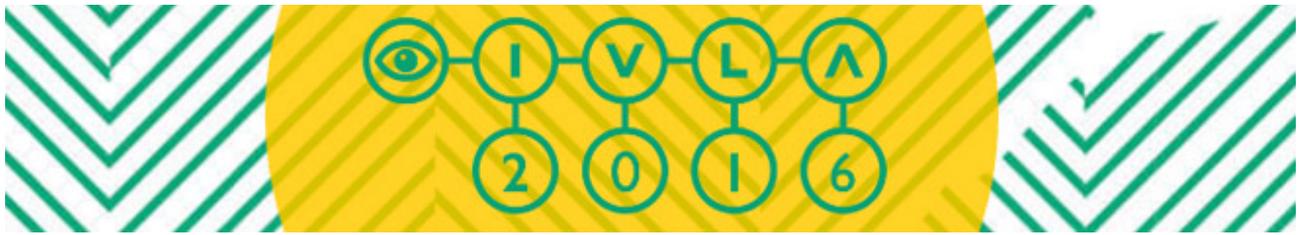
I am very lucky to look after a Faculty of Fine Arts that is one of the largest in North America – and I don't just mean that in terms of size, but in terms of the beautiful complexity that we represent. In fact, it's a bit of a misnomer, calling ourselves the faculty of "Fine" Arts, since we have long moved beyond just the "fine" into the performing, digital, cinematic, and design arts – as well as embracing the scholarly areas of art history, art education, and arts therapies. In short, as a Faculty of over 4,000 professors, staff, and students, we exist as a formidable cohort that trains and trades in all of the senses.

This has become exceptionally important in this current moment that we might argue represents a discreet crux in history. If, in the past, we have spoken of the temporal turn, or the spatial turn, I wonder if we are not now at the cusp of the "sensual turn." So, if this conference, and the reasons each of you may have been attracted by the theme is any indication, we are all part of a significant recuperation, invigoration, and implementation of sense-based thinking.

For material, physical, archival, acoustic, and conceptual thinkers such as the students in my Faculty, this places them at the forefront of developing potentially radical investigatory positions. One of my colleagues in the McGill architecture School describes this as "fabricatory knowledge"—the know-how that comes from making, doing, being—in the materials, in the body, in the text, in the space.

This is a kind of sensorial acuity that is hard to describe—it's a bit like having a circuit breaker at your disposal that, behind the metal doors, has myriad switches that can be engaged or thrown, flipped on or overloaded, all circuits firing or quiet in the house. Can you imagine being able to have control over that much electricity coursing through your mind and your body as it interconnects, questions, translates, and moves within the world? Can you imagine seeing with your hands, hearing through your mouth, touching with your eyes?

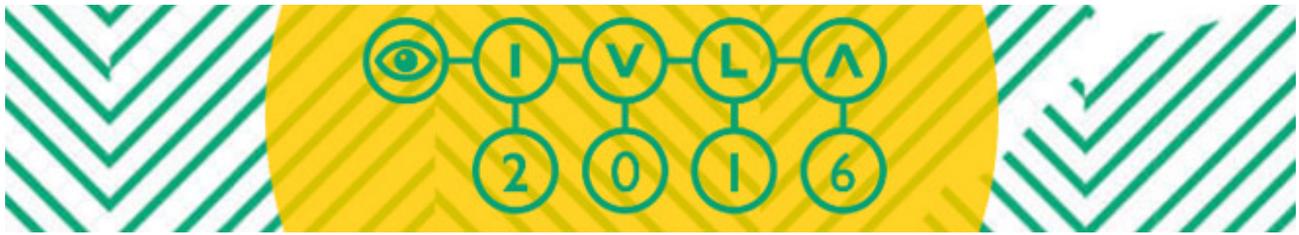
That's how my Faculty rolls...!



The arts—linked as they have been for millennia with the humanities—have a phenomenal advantage in this era of sensory authority. While people have long romanticized the arts—and for good reason— aesthetic perception will always be a heightened state of being in my mind—the real power in how we encounter the world’s phenomenological bounty, I would argue, has more to do with work than with any kind of genius. “Art is hard” as my husband says. And it’s hard because it’s an iterative, intuitive, intellectual, inferential, improvisatory, and oftentimes, very manual posture towards that world that is constantly teeming with potential. When one opens up all the senses, our surroundings are one hot, liquid, slurry of possibilities, and to choose just one form, one format, one formulation that will somehow capture that energy and make it manifest for others—well, that’s a difficult, gracious, and crucially important task.

So I hope we each enjoy some circuit-breaking moments in the next few days. May your fuses ignite and your lights burn bright... keep that metal door open, because our collective power will electrify the sensory sphere for all.

Rebecca Duclos , IVLA 2016 Montréal



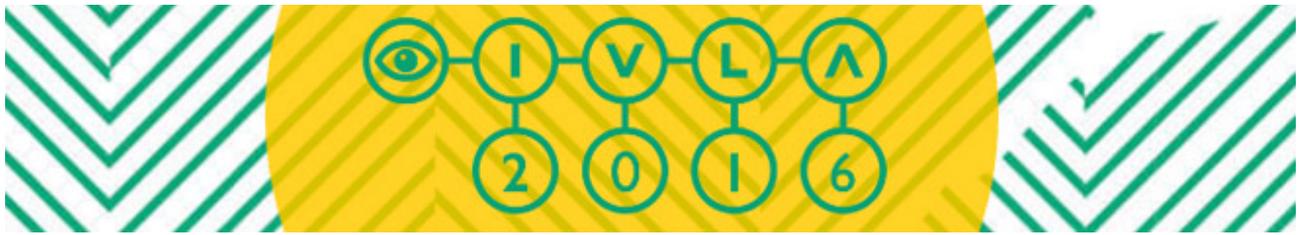
**NATALIE DOONAN, Up Close and Personal: Experiencing Art at IVLA 2016**

Natalie Doonan, Coordinator, Centre for Sensory Studies, and recent graduate of the Humanities Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program, Concordia University

*Engaging the Senses: 48<sup>th</sup> Annual International Visual Literacy Conference* at Concordia University was unique in its approach to visual literacy through all of the senses. Especially surprising in this regard were the many artworks included that appealed to non-visual or more-than visual modalities. A sense of immediacy was achieved in many of these works, whether by bringing audiences into direct relationship with the artist, inviting physical connection with objects, or triggering a response of disgust.

Patricia Search, artist and professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute showed her installation titled “Visual Literacy as a Multisensory Experience: A Choreography of Space, Time, and Motion”. This new media work invited participants to interact with visuals from two different computer programs to create kaleidoscopic images in constantly changing patterns and relationships. The piece also had a sound component that is affected in tandem with the visuals. Search and I encountered formidable technical challenges in attempting to install the work as she had envisioned it. The images from two screens were meant to be projected onto a wall and overlap to create patterns by two participants as they played with individual programs. Because this was not possible, Search sat with participants and talked each person through the process as they interacted with a modified version that could be played on two computer screens. While this was not what the artist had in mind, the one-to-one encounters were opportunities for intimate exchanges that are rarely available at conferences, where delegates rush from one presentation to the next. During exhibitions too, this kind of encounter is rare, as the artist is usually not present at all. In this case, fully embodied sensory engagement was achieved through personal interaction between a multimedia artwork, the audience member, and the artist-researcher.

Sharing the room with Search was visual anthropologist Philippe Messier, PhD Candidate at McGill University. His work, titled “Working through stones and codes: Video technics for the rediscoveries of hidden ethnographic relationships” is a two-channel video based on interviews conducted by Messier in Hyderabad, India. In the footage, viewers encounter stonecutters and computer engineers/hackers demonstrating and describing the work that they each perform. This work makes visible and audible the forms of labour involved in constructing everyday commodities. In it, Messier encourages viewers to

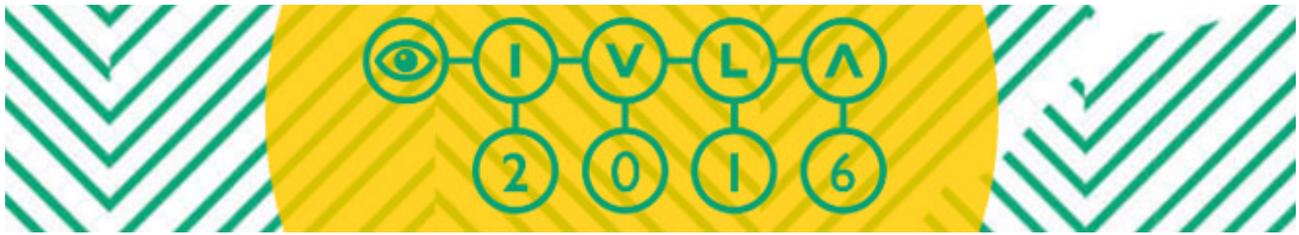


reconsider what appear to be impersonal objects of consumption. Seeing and hearing about the personal lives of their creators reveals these so-called objects to be part of complex, global, relational networks.

“The Distorting Mirror of Blindness: Visual Literacy and Non-Sighted Aesthetics” is a collaborative work between British artist David Johnson and Montreal-based artist-researcher Florian Grond. In what could be considered a contemporary form of Correspondence Art, Johnson and Grond took turns working on a sculpture, then 3D-scanning it and sending the file to the other to print and transform. This process was repeated several times, and the resulting 3D-printed sculptures were displayed as a series that reveals the gradual transformation of the object. This use of 3D printing challenges its usual association with throw-away culture and the multiple. While printing from a digital file allows for multiple iterations with no ostensible original, these sculptures are each one of a kind. Running the fingers over their surfaces is rewarded with the surprising texture of plastic that has been worked by hand with sandpaper to smooth over the usual bumpiness that is to be expected from a 3D printed object. The sculptures are artifacts that attest to a poetic transatlantic exchange and appearing /disappearing act.

On display alongside this collaborative series was the work of U.S. and U.K.-based sculptor Rosalyn Driscoll. Like Johnson and Grond, Driscoll makes tactile sculptures that are meant to be touched as much as observed. In “By the Light of the Body,” Driscoll incorporates a range of materials with contrasting textures such as rope, steel and rawhide. Training the fingers over these sculptures, sensations of coolness and smoothness are suddenly met with qualities of roughness and bumpiness. Exploring the varied surfaces, one encounters a sense of movement, followed by solid form. The room in which these works are displayed is darkened, with dim spotlights directed on the sculptures. It does not seem appropriate to discuss a “viewer” in this context. The display invites visitors to get up close to the sculptures in order to see, but appeals ultimately to the skin, demanding contact in a way that defies the usual conventions for experiencing art at a distance.

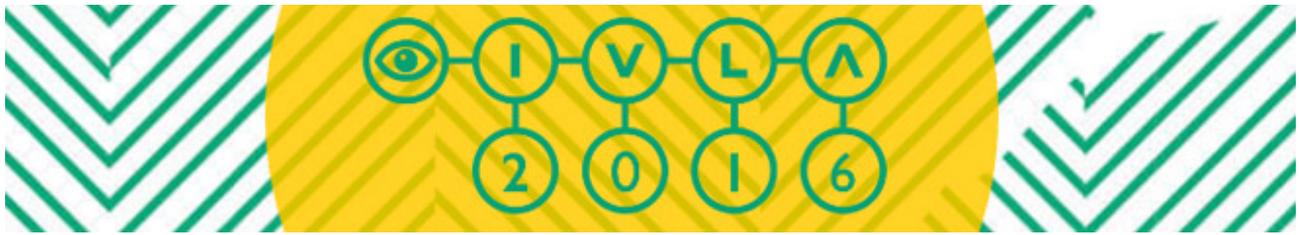
In addition to these and other exhibitions organized as part of the conference, Concordia’s Black Box served as a space for presentations that were experimental, performative or interactive in nature. For instance, Montreal-based artist Gisèle Trudel presented a performative talk called “Drawing a Transductive Ecosophy,” in which she reflected upon work with her artist research unit Ælab, showing documentation that also served as a surface for digital drawing *in situ*. Her live narrative was also



accompanied by recorded sound. Past and present tenses were blurred in this process, making previously created works immediately available to the audience as part of a live remix.

Similarly, the film “Across the Unseen Sea,” shown by U.K.-based artist Tereza Stehlikova was created both as documentation of a multi-sensory immersive culinary performance and as a sensual artwork in its own right. The richly textured surfaces scanned by Stehlikova’s lens shift from bubbling broth to frothy sea. Evocative rather than descriptive, the viewer’s sense of scale and proximity are disoriented as cakey mounds morph into Icelandic mountain ranges. In another film, “Dinner for Deep Surface Divers,” the camera brings textures into felt space as it reels from close-ups of slimy tentacles to zoom out on a couple as they stuff greedy mouths with writhing octopus. Teetering between desire and disgust, this film is not for vegetarians or the faint of heart.

While at first glance these works appear to be very different, engagement with them through all of the senses discloses their commonality. Although they represent a wide spectrum of technical and thematic approaches, each of these pieces overcomes the respectful distance that is usually assumed in the dispassionate contemplation of artwork. In each its own way, the works described above bring audiences in close, inviting intimate investigation of surprising surfaces and complex contiguities. By engaging all of our senses, these artists bid us into more careful awareness of our complex participation in dynamic environments.



## **KRISTY JONES Big Visions, and Visions for Accessibility**

Impressions of the IVLA Annual Meeting,

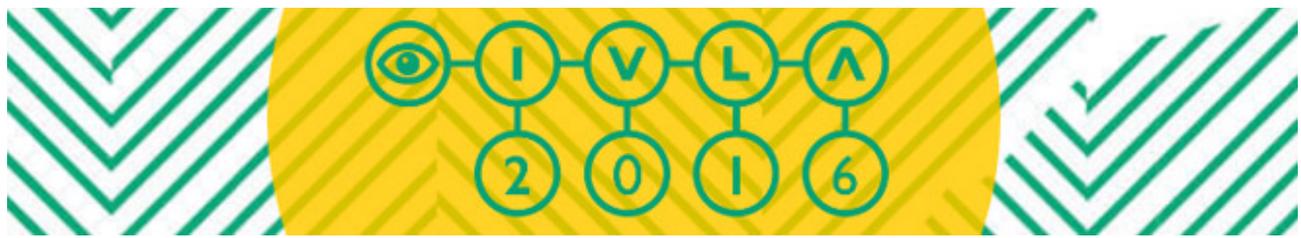
5-8 October 2016, Concordia University, Montreal.

Kristy Jones, Intern, Centre for Sensory Studies, Concordia University and recent graduate of College, Cambridge University

What barriers are there for people who lack visual ability at a conference on visual literacy? Ideologically at least, a number of presentations at this year's IVLA conference suggested that these barriers were few and permeable. The association's broad-minded and academically thorough approach to visual literacy were hallmarks of this conference, with a number of sessions heralding a move away from traditional models of art and anthropology and towards a more inclusive, multi-sensory and multi-modal discourse.

An obvious contender for consideration here is the panel organised by Piet Devos, titled 'The Distorting Mirror of Blindness: Visual Literacy and Non-Sighted Aesthetics'. A veritable line up of Devos, Florian Grond, David Johnson, Georgina Kleege, Hannah Thompson and Vanessa Warne discussed how the blindness-sightedness dichotomy has been frequently misrepresented in art and literature. Presenters described tools used by people who are blind in a world which is visual; tools wielded not only to 'pass', but to carve out new creative spaces which challenged normative assumptions. The sighted and blind notions of seeing and being seen, thus exposed, were applied to the visual and literary arts through historical and contemporary societies.

Joao Kulcsar also ventured into the territory of non-sighted visual arts, explaining his work teaching students who are visually impaired about the use of photography. Kulcsar indicated the efficacy of multi-modal artistry, and the importance on a personal level of participating in the visual world for his students. As an individual researching disability and the senses, I was inspired by the work undertaken with people living with dementia by Pia Scharler, and the use of art to teach students with language based learning differences (Carolyn Berenato). Art's use (in practice

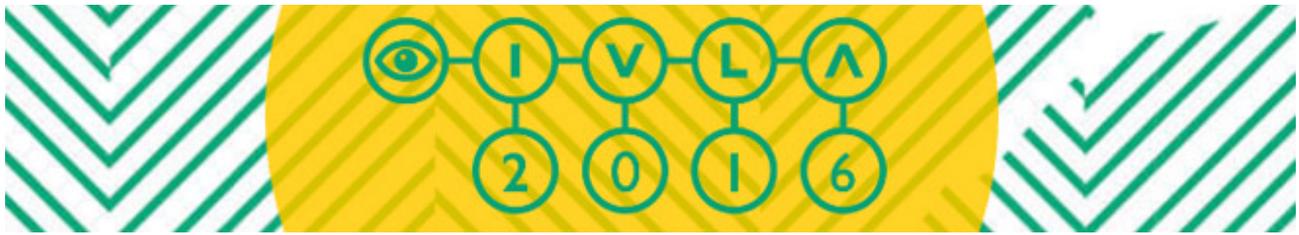


and product) in a manner not wholly didactic or aesthetic, but rather therapeutic, signals a desire to exploit the potential of visual literacy. With enduring relevance and clear significance outside of the gallery and academy, these voices helped to ensure that IVLA speaks clearly and loudly into the contemporary world.

IVLA's conference was, then, open to discussions about disability and the senses. But how open was it for people with disabilities? From an accessibility standpoint, I found the conference rather wanting. Commendable were the efforts to cater for various dietary requirements, and the recognition that some delegates had a visual impairment on the part of several presenters. Classen's plenary, which used a variety of visuals, was accompanied by a subtle yet skilful verbal exposition of the artwork used. This not only assisted members of the audience who had a biological sensory impairment, but also those who, like myself, had a cognitive sensory impairment (i.e. general ignorance in the art field!). Joao Kulcsar again stands out in my recollection of the conference for his description not only of the visuals used, but also of himself; a small gesture perhaps, but not an insignificant one.

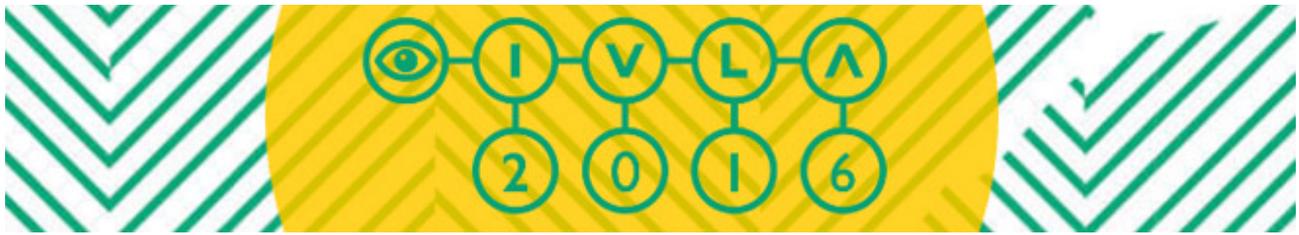
Speaking constructively, however, many steps needed to be taken to make the conference more accessible. The program was not available in large print, or electronically in its final version for use on e-readers, neither were any of the handouts for sessions (to the best of my knowledge). Granted, presenters would not necessarily be aware of ways in which their sessions could be made more accessible, but IVLA could certainly produce guidelines for them.

On a more general level, registration forms could have included a section where delegates could indicate if they would need assistance in any area, or if a helper or carer would be attending with them. Offers to meet and greet people at the airport, or to take people from their accommodation to the conference site may be another simple gesture which, even if not accepted, shows the desire of the hosts to ensure that all delegates have a smooth and pleasant experience. It would have been useful if verbal, as well as visual, explanations were given regarding the location of the food, elevators, and conference rooms, and to have had giant maps on display. Indicating online/in print before the conference whether or not venues would be



accessible for people with mobility difficulties, have accessible restrooms, or have a hearing loop installed would also be a good step forward; it is immaterial whether IVLA currently has members for whom this would be relevant. Material, logistical and, above all, personal accessibility is not merely about ease of access, it signals that care is taken to ensure that all contributions from all people are valid and welcomed.

IVLA's conference was admirably accessible in theory. Contributions from scholars and practitioners went some way to either include or promote the idea of non-normate, or non-sighted visual literacy. In practice, however, the conference was rather inaccessible. If the vitality of creative discussion represented here is to continue and flourish, future conferences might consider taking practical and visible steps to ensure that all can participate meaningfully in this discussion.



## **ADAM LEVINE**

The 48th annual conference of the International Visual Literacy Association (IVLA) looked beyond sight to explore the importance of all human senses. Concordia University in Montreal was the perfect venue for the event with its Center for Sensory Studies, headed by David Howes, our conference co-chair.

One area of inquiry this year's conference took up was the idea of 'sensory museology'--the repatriation of senses other than sight to the fine art museum experience. At the Toledo Museum of Art, we strive to integrate multiple senses into the viewing experience. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that multimodal learning is an effective pedagogical technique, and museums' purposes are educational.

This year's IVLA conference was an exciting forum to experience sensory museology in action at Montreal institutions, most notably the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, to discuss cutting-edge ideas with colleagues from other museums and the academy, and to share developments in our thinking and the evolution of our practice.

As a previous host institution for the IVLA conference, I cannot commend Concordia enough for a vibrant and dynamic three days in Montreal.

Adam Levine

Toledo Museum of Art