



The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space

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Recent research in the cognitive sciences gives us a new perspective on the cognitive and sensory landscape.

In *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space*, museum expert Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone, professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School bring together scholars and museum practitioners from around the world to highlight new trends and untapped opportunities for using such modalities as scent, sound, and touch in museums to offer more immersive experiences and diverse sensory engagement for visually- and otherwise-impaired patrons. Visitor studies describe how different personal and group identities color our cultural consumption and might serve as a compass on museum journeys. Psychologists and educators look at the creation of memories through different types of sensory engagement with objects, and how these memories in turn affect our next cultural experience. An anthropological perspective on the history of our multisensory engagement with ritual and art objects, especially in cultures that did not privilege sight over other senses, allows us a glimpse of what museums might become in the future. Education researchers discover museums as unique educational playgrounds that allow for a variety of learning styles, active and passive exploration, and participatory learning. Designers and architects suggest a framework for thinking about design solutions for a museum environment that invites an intuitive, multisensory and flexible exploration, as well as minimizes physical hurdles.

While attention has been paid to accessibility for the physically-impaired since passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, making buildings accessible is only the first small step in elevating museums to be centers of learning and culture for all members of their communities. This landmark book will help all museums go much further.

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Editorial Review

Review

From 'Please DO touch the Exhibits' to 'The Museum as Smellscape,' a new book hitting museum studies shelves this spring explores how the five sense can be engaged in cultural experiences. *The Multisensory Museum* unites museum professionals with psychologists, neuroscientists, architects and other specialists to examine how physical interactions influence visitors' understanding of objects and exhibitions. Special emphasis is placed on discussing how museums can reach audiences that are sensorially impaired.

(Museum)

This densely researched book not only invites us to see the potential of multisensory experiences in museums, but also anchors that invitation in evidence from neuroscience that they matter. The editors are pioneers in linking these two uncommonly paired disciplines, and they make a case that is impossible to dismiss. . . . Invest time in *The Multisensory Museum*, and I would wager that generous insights infiltrate how you create meaningful, emotional, and satisfying experiences for everyone. *(Exhibition)*

Curated by Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone, is a collection of essays that "seeks to open a dialogue between modern museum science and human neuroscience." It mobilizes experts in various disciplines – historians, architects, anthropologists, artists, curators and cognitive and sensory studies' researchers – to investigate current strategies in galvanizing audience engagement with museums. The result is an interesting hybrid: a narrative discourse with an axiological thrust that employs sensory and marketing studies' applicability in the museum context. The case studies are intelligibly presented, each thematic chapter being introduced by remarks on the workings of the brain and on how it decodes information. *(Muse)*

The *Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space* is a book with a mission: to be a bridge between two worlds, that of cognitive research and museum studies.... The book seeks to open a dialogue between modern museum science and human neuroscience. It aims to highlight today's best multisensory practices and reflect on how new research and technology will influence museums in the future.... Reading the different visions and experiences in this book broadens your mind. It makes you realize that there is a world beyond the eyes. It also makes clear that, like the neuroscientists do, we (museum researchers) also have to deepen our knowledge about what is happening inside the brains of our visitors when they encounter our exhibits, our buildings, and our programs. Cooperating with cognitive scientists and conducting more experiments within the museum setting will give us more insight. It is also something we need to do: If we say we are about learning or reinforcing cognition in the broader sense we have to connect our experiences to the existing knowledge about how the brain works. *(Visitor Studies)*

I heartily recommend *The Multisensory Museum* to museum colleagues everywhere. This book is for anyone interested in learning, the process of meaning-making, and the potential of museums. Contributors range from psychologists and neuroscientists to veteran museum educators. Each offers information and ideas of immense practical value. *The Multisensory Museum* offers a highly informative and inspiring combination of research data, educational theory, and case studies. This collection will expand most readers' understanding of the integrated role sensory experiences play when people find meaning in the material world. (Linda Duke, Director of the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art)

About the Author

Nina Levent is executive director of Art Beyond Sight Collaborative in New York City, part of Art

Education for the Blind. Art Beyond Sight is dedicated to making the visual arts a vital part of the lives of visually-impaired people.

Alvaro Pascual-Leone, M.D., Ph.D., is professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School; Director of the Berenson-Allen Center for Noninvasive Brain Stimulation; Program Director of the Harvard-Thorndike Clinical Research Unit; and an Attending Neurologist at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center — all in Boston. He is a practicing behavioral neurologist and movement disorders specialist.

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