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Book Review:

***Audiodeskrypcja dzieł sztuki. Metody, problemy, przykłady* (Eng. *Audio description of works of art. Methods, problems, examples*),
by: **Aneta Pawłowska, Julia Sowińska-Heim,****

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The monograph aims to reflect on knowledge and practical achievements regarding the concept and problems associated with making visual arts available in a manner adapted to perception of people with vision impairment. The authors also share experience gained during implementation of their own project (which made it possible to verify knowledge during practical activities) and show how creation of audio descriptions, i.e. verbal descriptions of art works adapted to the needs of the visually impaired, using the project based learning method may become an important element of an academic didactic process.

In the first chapter, titled “Sposoby rekompensaty zaburzeń wzroku” (Eng. Methods of compensating visual disorders), the authors examine multisens-

sory solutions, complementing verbal descriptions, such as models of entire buildings or interiors, bas-reliefs or typhlographics (convex graphic forms). They also emphasize importance of making original art works made of durable materials available, as well as reproducing exhibits based on original pieces. They also mention additional materials, i.e.: Braille prints, enlarged prints, audio guide recordings, websites according to the standards of World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) or the Seeing Assistant smartphone app.

In the second chapter, “Metody tworzenia audiodeskrypcji” (Eng. Methods of creating audio descriptions), Pawłowska and Sowińska-Heim refer to methods of delivering visual content in a verbal way, which enables blind and visually impaired people to perceive works of art. They discuss the subject of painting theme and a direction of its description, calling for succinctness, clarity and language economy. They also recommend transition from a general to more detailed description, which should then be supplemented with the context of work creation, e.g. a technique or style of the art work. Moreover, the researchers address the issue of duration of audio description (AD) and emphasize that AD should be personalized, different for those who have been blind from birth and those who have lost their sight at a later age.

In the third chapter “Piękno, ekfrazo, obiektywizm” (Eng. Beauty, ekphrasis, objectivism), the authors ponder on how to reconcile audio description faithfulness with interpretation ambiguity and experience of aesthetic emotions. Paraphrasing Voltaire, we could say that the audio descriptions are like women: either beautiful or faithful. As a matter of fact, this transformation has its own scientific foundation, since audio description falls within the scope of a specific kind of translation, namely intersemiotic translation. The researchers are in favour of experiencing emotions and beauty, which, according to them, may be achieved by using ekphrases or searching for correspondence of arts.

In the fourth chapter, titled “Beneficjenci końcowi tworzonych audiodeskrypcji” (Eng. Final beneficiaries of created audio descriptions), the humanists point out that audio descriptions are created not only for blind and visually impaired people, but also for those with other sight disabilities or the elderly. They also emphasize difference between a person who has been blind from birth (Pol. “niewidomy”) and the one who has lost sight (Pol. “ociemniały”) and stress importance of the topics discussed, since there is a significant number of people with visual impairments in Poland and around the world, who due to their disability find it difficult to function normally and maintain



contact with art. Thus, it is so important to create audio descriptions, which make exhibitions and museum collections available and accessible to this group of audience.

In the fifth chapter, “Percepcja otoczenia miejskiego oraz dziedzictwa architektonicznego” (Eng. Perception of the urban environment and architectural heritage), the authors refer to perception of art works with the help of other, non-visual stimuli, such as hearing, touch, echolocation of obstacles or creating personal cognitive maps by the blind. They also describe multi-sensory influence of urban space or haptic experience of the environment. What is more, they discuss the issue of using new technologies in making urban space accessible to people with visual impairment, providing the example of beacons, small radio signal transmitters, thanks to which it is possible to send information about location to smartphones.

Let us emphasize that the presented book is an outcome of a scientific and research project of Pawłowska and Sowińska-Heim from the Department of Art History at the University of Łódź, implemented from 2014 to 2016. In addition to basic research, the project also covered practical classes called “Audio description of art works”, carried out in the above-mentioned organizational unit of the Faculty of Philosophy and History of the University of Łódź in the academic year 2013/2014 as part of a professional project or an “E-type” academic course related to the 20th-century art. This is noteworthy, since the problem of audio description is not addressed during the studies in history of art or in the artistic faculties. It is discussed during translation studies, especially post-graduate ones, such as “Digital and social inclusion: websites, audio description, multimedia” carried out by the University of Silesia in Katowice, a postgraduate course in Audiovisual Translation at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań or Postgraduate course in specialist translations: audiovisual works of the SWPS University. We may also find single courses or seminars, which are usually carried out as a part of courses for audiovisual translators, e.g. Audio description in the theatre and museum or Audio description in cinema and television within teaching offer of the Chair for Translation Studies and Intercultural Communication of the Jagiellonian University or courses of FORTIMA Akademia Filmowego Słowa: Audio description of film works.

Description of the classes conducted at the Department of Art History of the University of Łódź was discussed in detail in the sixth chapter, “Nauka audiodeskrypcji w edukacji akademickiej” (Eng. Teaching audio description

in academic education) and the seventh one “Tworzenie audiodeskrypcji — Uwarunkowania sytuacyjne” (Eng. Creating audio descriptions — Situational conditions) of the reviewed book. Students participating in the course created audio descriptions, describing key visual elements necessary to understand paintings and objects from the Museum of Art in Łódź (ms¹ and ms² divisions) and the Museum of the City of Łódź under bilateral cooperation agreements. The descriptions were then digitized and sounded in the UŁ Recording Studio.

In the sixth chapter, we learn that the classes were conducted, using the Project Based Learning Method with the PBL (Problem Based Learning) strategy. At first, students carried out surveys regarding perception of visual arts by the blind from the Łódź Branch of the Polish Association of the Blind, and then they outlined the project. Works on the project also covered consultations with educators holding certificates for work with the audience with communication challenges and with the Foundations: Audio description, “Chance for the Blind” or “Culture without Barriers”. The students worked both in a traditional way and in cyberspace, using a virtual dashboard on the Google Docs, mailboxes and Facebook.

The seventh chapter discusses all stages of the project. The first one included description of the Neoplastic Room at the Museum of Art in Łódź (ms¹) and four works exhibited inside: *Counter composition* by Theo van Doesburg (1925); *Unistic Composition II* by Władysław Strzemiński (1932); *The composition of three equivalents* by Georges Vantongerloo (1921) and *Abstract Painting II* by Henryk Stażewski (1928–29). The second one: audio description of selected objects from the Museum of Art in Łódź (ms²), namely: black and white photography by Eugeniusz Haneman, *Insurgent at the Church of the Holy Cross I* (1944), an acrylic painting on canvas by Peter Klasen, *Saturday morning* (1967) and oil on canvas *Untitled* by Sam Francis (1966). The third one: description of museum interiors of the Museum of the City of Łódź, being a part of a permanent exhibition, implemented within the “Museum within our reach” project, co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage within the “Accessible Culture” Program.

The reviewed book also includes audio descriptions from three above-mentioned project stages, photos of paintings and audio-described objects, as well as photos from project implementation, students’ evaluation and self-evaluation charts, which document work with the project based method, as well as



commentary of the educator from the Museum of the City of Łódź, Paulina Dzwonkowska, on audio description in museum practice of the MCL.

The work is addressed to those interested in the problem of making art works available to the disabled, both in the museum and urban space: art historians, museum educators, architects, sociologists, psychologists, linguists, translators, museum workers, curators, designers, etc.

Let us point out that the reviewed scientific monograph is innovative and pioneering in terms of the subject matter discussed, since on the Polish publishing market, we will not find a comprehensive book in Polish about art work ADs. There are only guide books, such as “ABC. Gość niepełnosprawny w muzeum” (Eng. ABC. A disabled guest in the museum), edited by Joanna Grzonkowska and Marek Rogowski (Narodowy Instytut Muzealnictwa i Ochrony Zbiorów, Warszawa, 2013), or individual contributions in a form of scientific or general articles. An unquestionable advantage of the book is also practical description of a university teaching process: creating audio description using the project based method.

Let us also mention that the book has already been recognized in the academic environment, its authors have been granted the 1st-class Award of the Rector of the University of Łódź, and the project itself has been distinguished in a business environment, receiving the prestigious 2017 LUMEN Prize — Leaders in University Management.