

# *Audio Description from Within: The Artist's Turn*

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# 1. Introduction and Motivation

- Art and AD lover fascinated by how the artistic experience of blind and visually-impaired can be enhanced.
- Motivated by work of scholars who have challenged the supremacy of the sighted interpretation voice in art museums or galleries (Cachia, 2013; Chotin & Thompson, 2021; Eardley et al., 2022; Kleege, 2018, 2021), I decided to undertake an experiment on my own.
- Exposing blind and visually-impaired participants to AD created by non-sighted and sighted audio describers to get a sense of preferences.
- Giving voice to the non-sighted artists who create their own audio descriptions.

## 2. My Study



- <https://bienal.fundaciononce.es/viii-bienal>
- 5 blind or visually-impaired artists, but only 4 could participate in this study and 2 provided their own ADs.
- Flexiguía (audio guide) and artists' audio descriptions.
- Participants: 27 participants: 13 blind and 14 visually-impaired.
- Two different ADs and order of exposure: three patterns.
- Interview questions



## **True love will find you in the end**

Autor: GOSSIAUX, Emilie

Disciplina: Esculturas

Técnica: Tallada en espuma de poliestireno, cubierta con papel maché 158.75 x 116.84 x 96.52 cm



# AD by Emilie Gossiaux (English)

*True Love Will Find You in the End* (2021) is my sculptural installation composed of two figurative sculptures made of Styrofoam, steel and papier-mâché coated with a transparent matte varnish. Both sculptures are about a meter and a half tall, and together they occupy a meter and a half of space from left to right.

The sculptures depict two hybrid figures standing side by side, holding hands, with their heads slightly turned to look at each other. On the right, there is a naked woman with a dog's head; the figure on the left is an anthropomorphized dog with a long tail standing on its hind legs with a woman's head. I made both sculptures to be about the same height and proportions as me, and the body of the dog is modeled after my guide dog London, who is an English Labrador.

The sculptures look like smooth stone and are light gray, with some variations of darker gray. The dog's nose, lips and eyes are painted black, as are the eyes and eyebrows on the woman's face on the dog's body. There are other details on the figures, for example, the navel on the woman's belly and 6 small nipples on the dog's stomach.

The sculptures are looking at each other with affection.

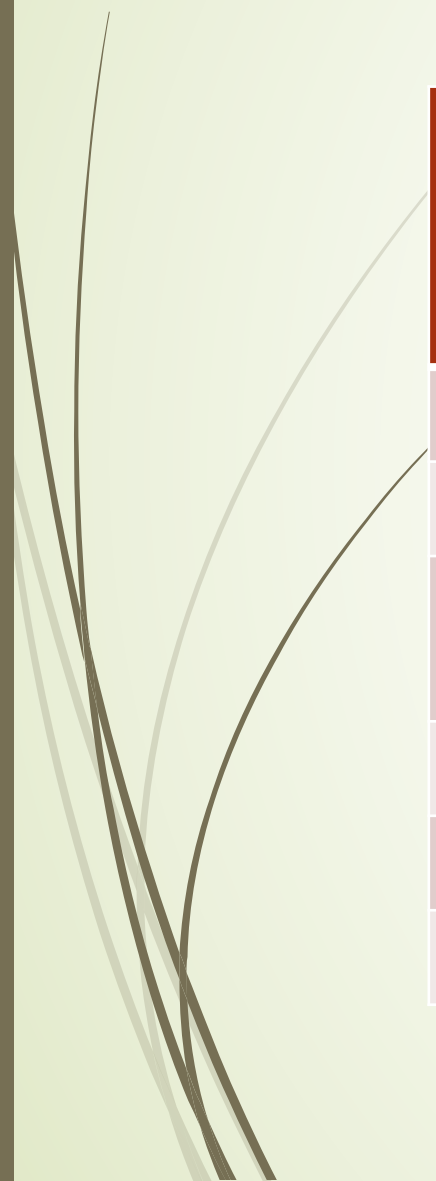



## AD by Flexiguía (translated into English for this presentation)

These are two sculptures in human form standing, holding hands and with their heads bent to look at each other. The one on the right is a nude woman with a dog's head. On the left there is a dog in human form with a long tail and a woman's head. The dog's nose, lips and eyes are painted in black, as are the eyes and eyebrows of the woman's face on the dog's body. There are other details on the figures, for example, the navel on the woman's belly and six nipples on the dog's stomach. Both sculptures are about one and a half meters tall.

Emilie Gossiaux is a young deafblind artist who has used art to live and not give up. At the age of five she developed deafness and when she was 21 she lost her sight in a car accident. However, deaf blindness has not prevented her from continuing to develop her creative and artistic abilities through touch. Thanks to her determination, and to her guide dog 'London', to whom this work is dedicated, she found in art a vital motivation.

In addition to her work as a creator, Gossiaux works as an educator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. There she leads tours for people with disabilities.



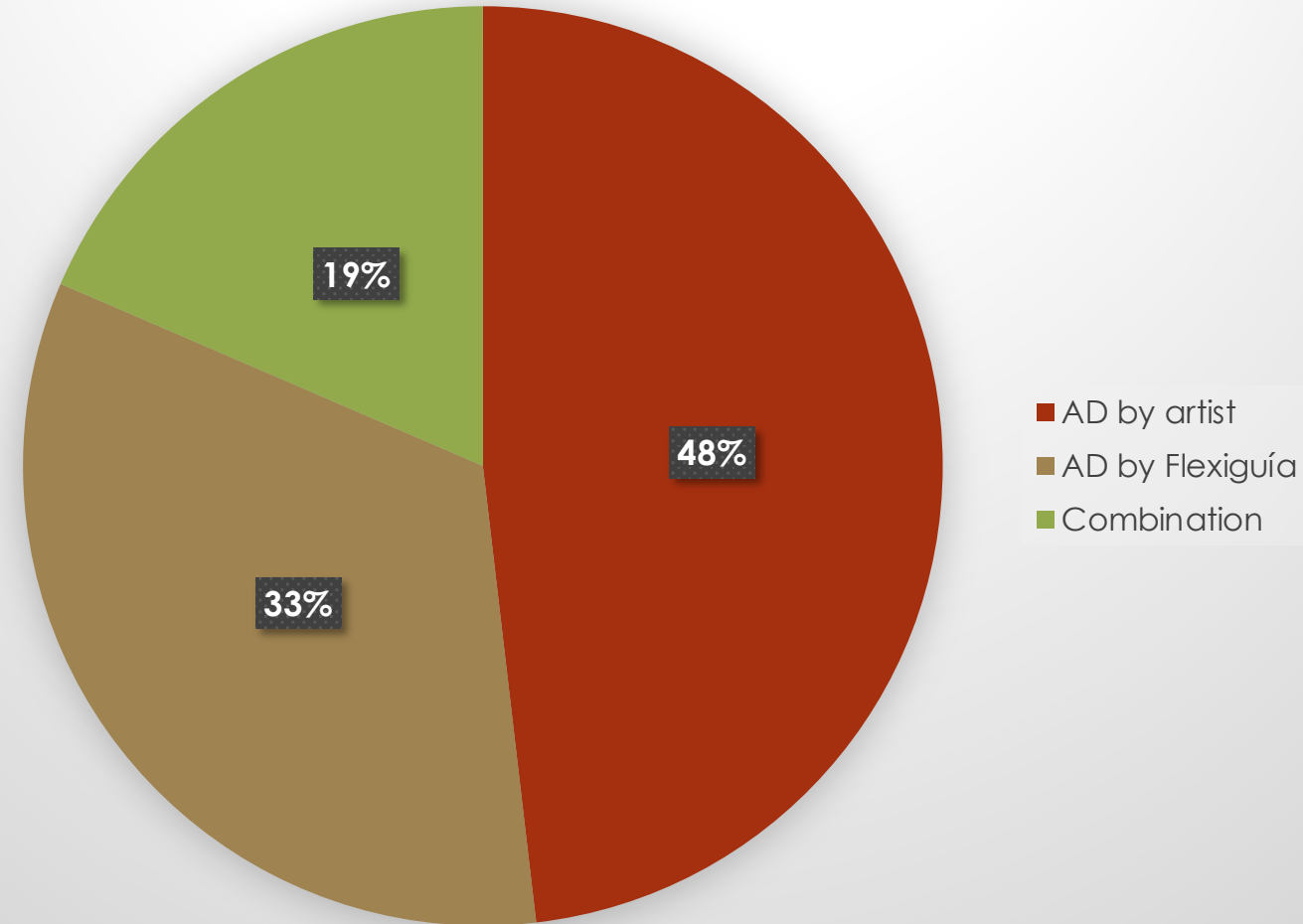
Emilie's AD	Flexiguía's AD
Materials	
First person	
"Looking each other with affection"	
	Artist's disability
	Where the artist works
Colors	

### 3. Results

#### Preferences of AD in *True Love* by Emilie Gossiaux

- Out of 27 participants, 13 preferred the artist's AD, 9 preferred Flexiguía, and 5 a combination of the two.

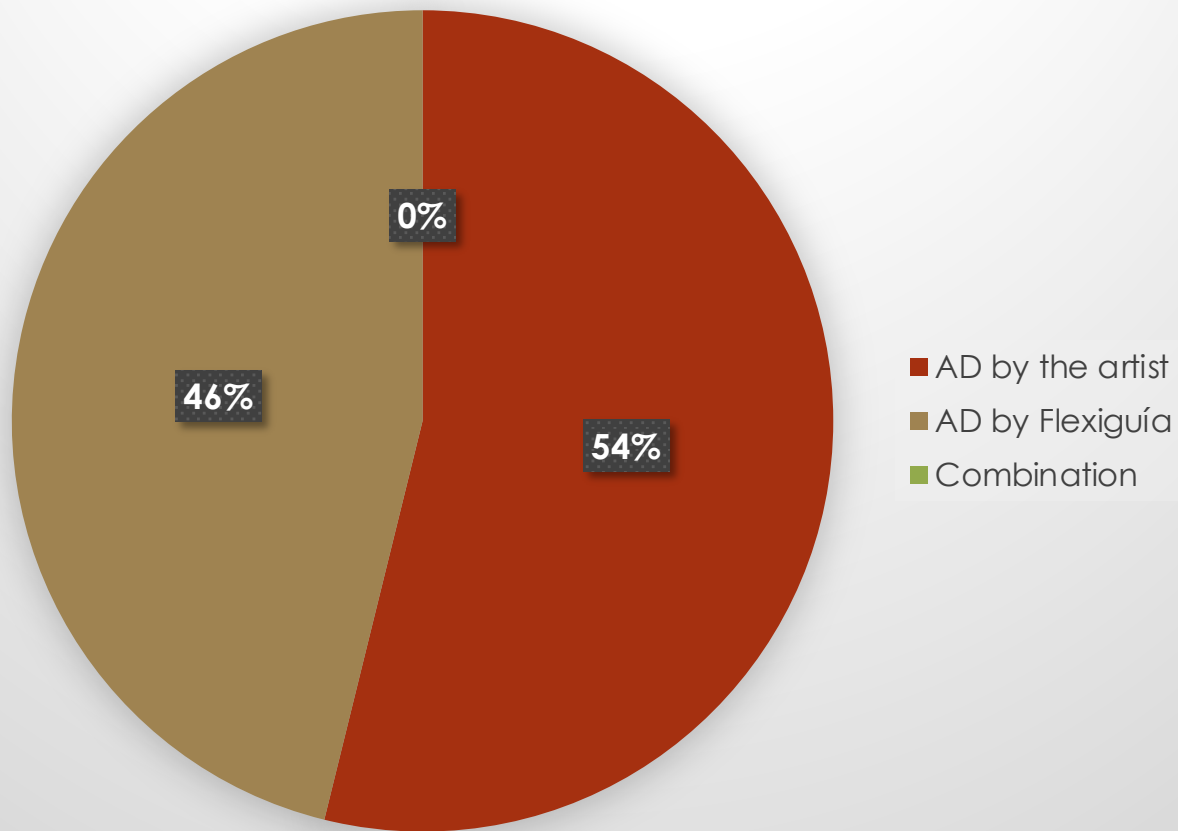
AD total preferences



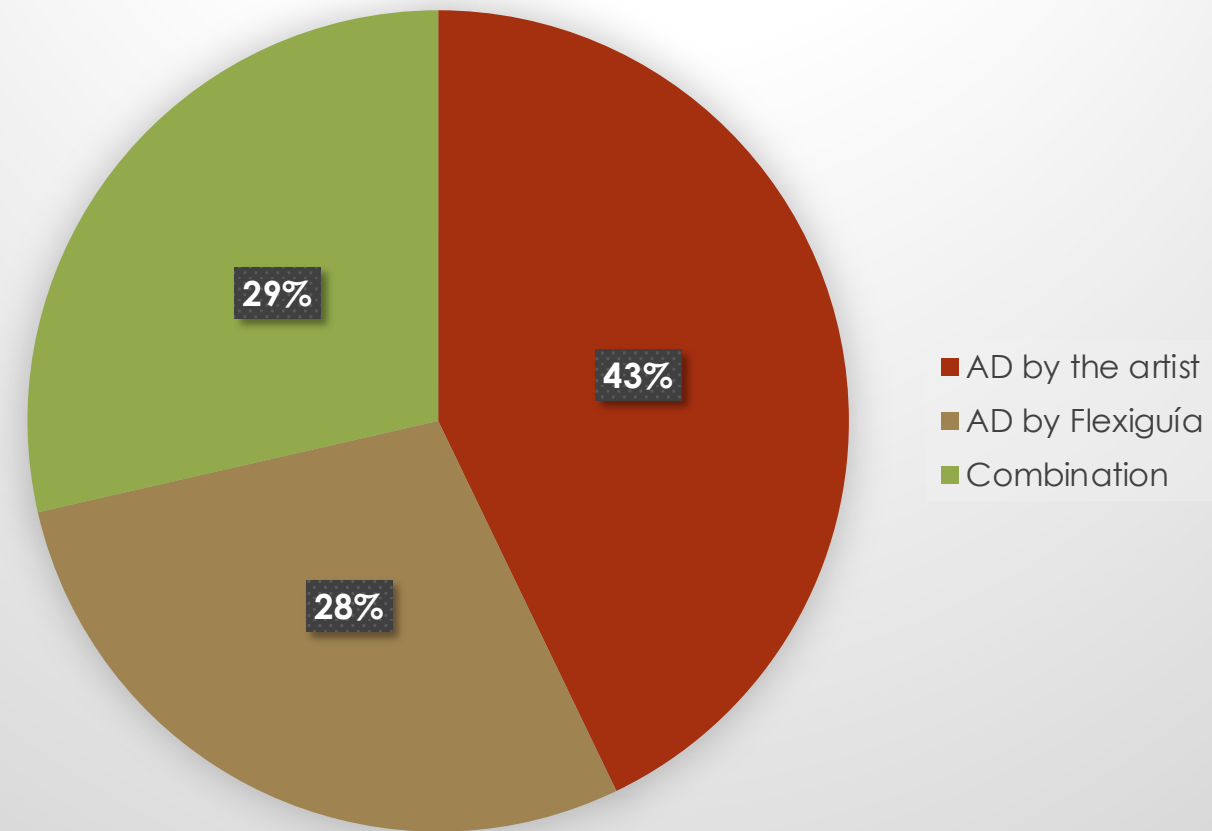


- Out of 13 blind participants, 7 preferred the artist's AD and 6 Flexiguía.
- Out of 14 visually-impaired participants, 6 preferred the artist's AD and 4, Flexiguía and 4 a combination of the two.

**AD Preferences among blind participants**



**AD preferences among visually-impaired audiences**





Paloma Navares. "Canto Rodado. Els Banyets", 2004. Video-escultura. Serie de 5. Proyección de vídeo (1997) sobre un canto rodado de 15 x 17 x 14 cm.

## Canto rodado. Els Banyets

Autor: NAVARES, Paloma

Disciplina: Vídeo-escultura

Técnica:Proyección de vídeo sobre un canto rodado 15 x 17 x 14 cm

Fecha: 2004

# AD created with the artist's insights

A video is shown projected on a clean floating boulder with the image of a woman, whose face we never see. The female figure moves through the waves and the little tiny sea breeze pushes her and swallows her down until it devours her. This woman is absorbed by the depth, she is swallowed by the sea, as we are all swallowed by death, or illness or pain, or lack of vision, darkness.

The main piece is floating on the stone. There is like a lack of gravity in the piece, in the space and there is a rumor that is typical of the bottom of the sea. If you scuba dive it's like turbulence, in silence and peace.

'Canto rodado. Els Banyets' is a tribute to the great British writer Virginia Woolf who decided to extinguish her life leaving us a collective memory. This work belongs to a series of poets who commit suicide. The artist Paloma Navares, who works especially through technology, made this piece about 20 years ago.

EXPLANATION, BUT LESS EXPLICIT, ARTIST INFO ANALOGIES DESCRIPTION First person subjectivity



# AD created by Flexiguía (translated into English for this presentation)



**PALOMA NAVARES. CANTO RODADO. ELS BANYETS.**

A video is shown projected on a boulder. A small rock found in the bed of rivers, streams, ponds or beaches. In this video appears a woman wearing a swimsuit. She is face down. Her body can be seen, with her legs and arms open, and a long mane of hair floating in the water. She is lying on a gray stone with white stripes.

'Canto rodado. Els Banyets' is a tribute to the British writer Virginia Woolf, who committed suicide by filling her coat with stones and throwing herself into the river. This capital figure of letters and feminist study interests Paloma Navares in multiple aspects. On the one hand, because the passage of time, the beauty of bodies, aging or feminism are some of the themes in which her work delves. And on the other hand, because Navares also investigates the limits between life and death, sanity and madness, or health and illness, among others.

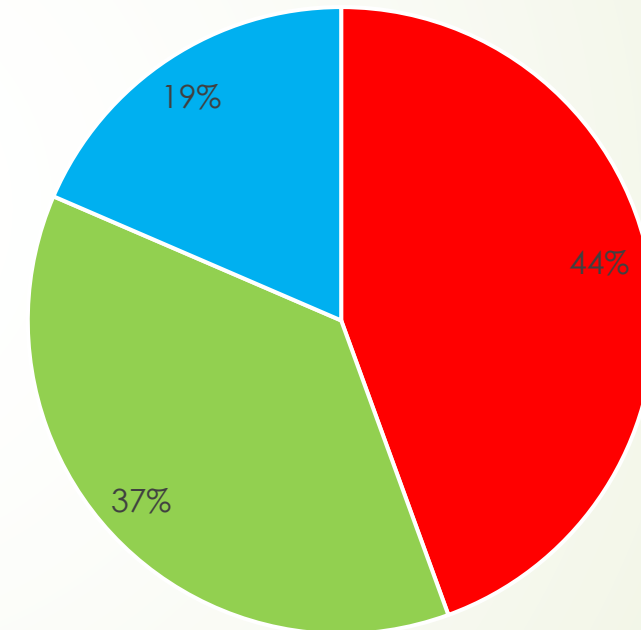
The artist from Burgos combines in her works techniques such as painting, sculpture, photography and sound. She plays with light and shadow, with spaces and with the integration of different perspectives and languages.

# Results: “mixed” technique AD

## Preferences of AD in *Canto rodado* by Paloma Navares

Out of 27 participants, 12 preferred the artist’s AD, 10 preferred Flexiguía, and 5 a combination of the two.

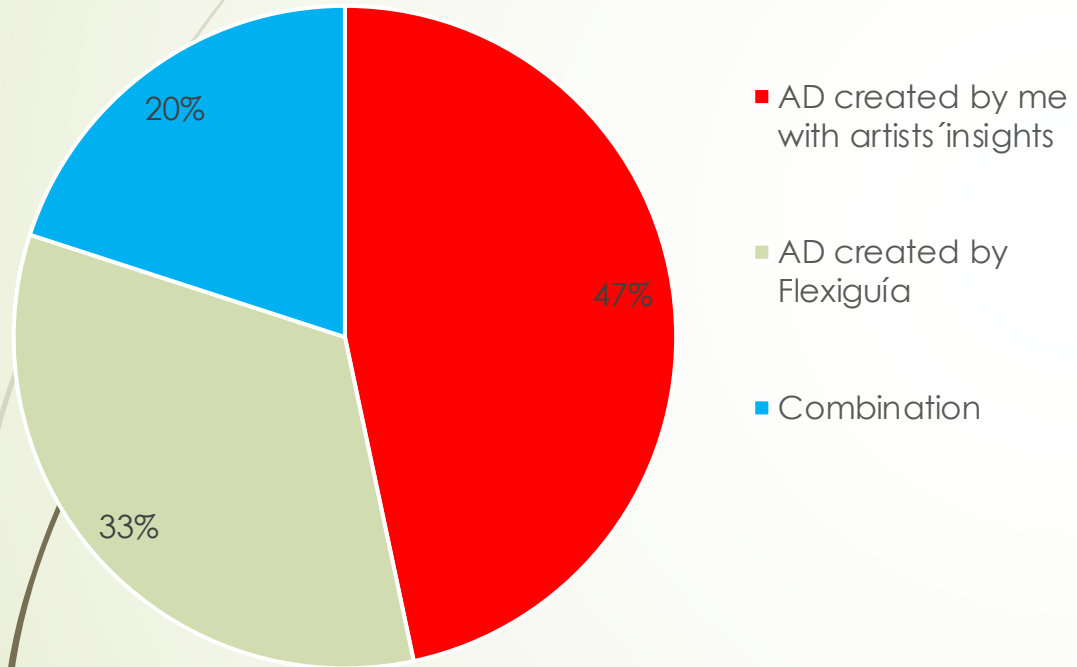
AD Preferences



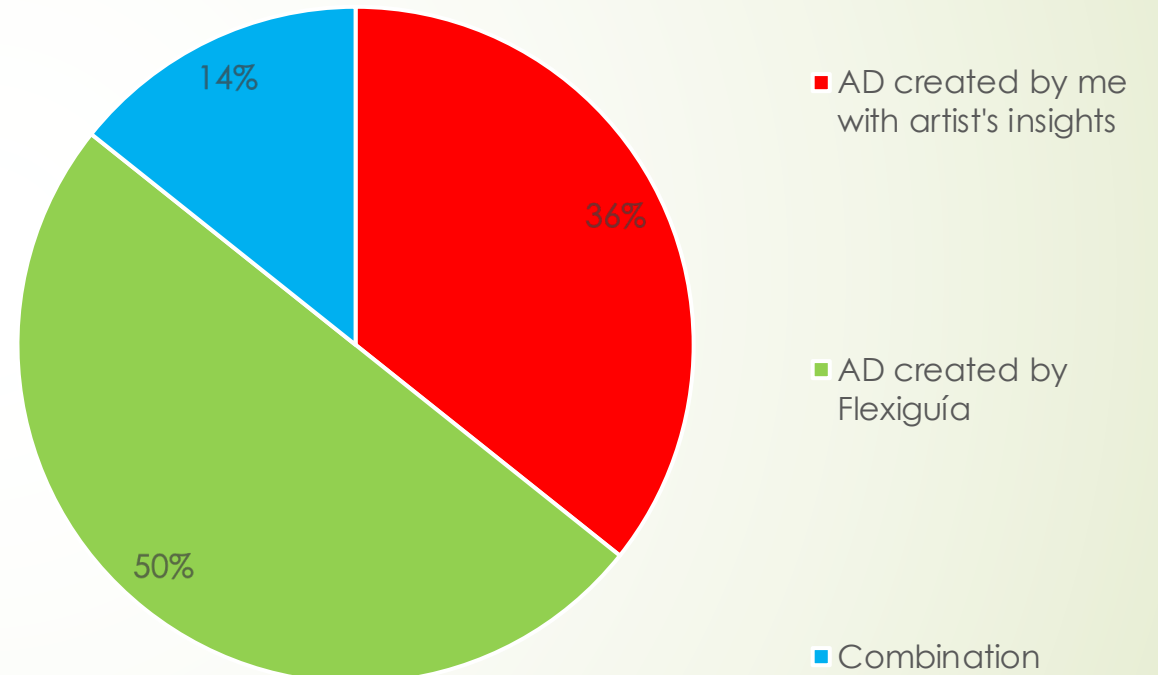
- AD created by me with the artist's insights
- AD created by Flexiguía
- combination



AD preferences among blind participants



AD preferences among visually-impaired artists





## Singer sewing machine

Autor: PARTINGTON, Zoe

Técnica: Audio y sonido con fotografías para videntes

Fecha: Abril 2022



Silver spoon



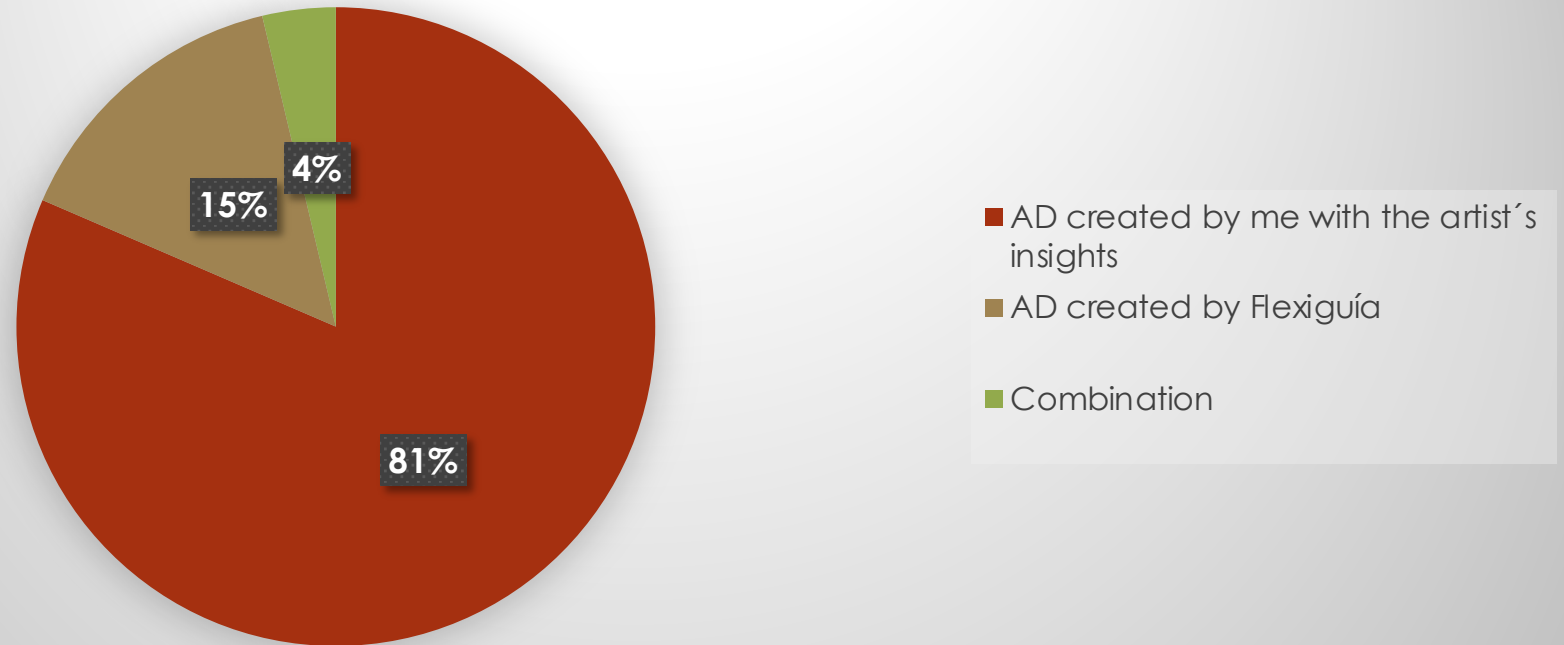
Whisk



Hourglass

# Results: “mixed” technique AD in Zoe Partington

AD preferences

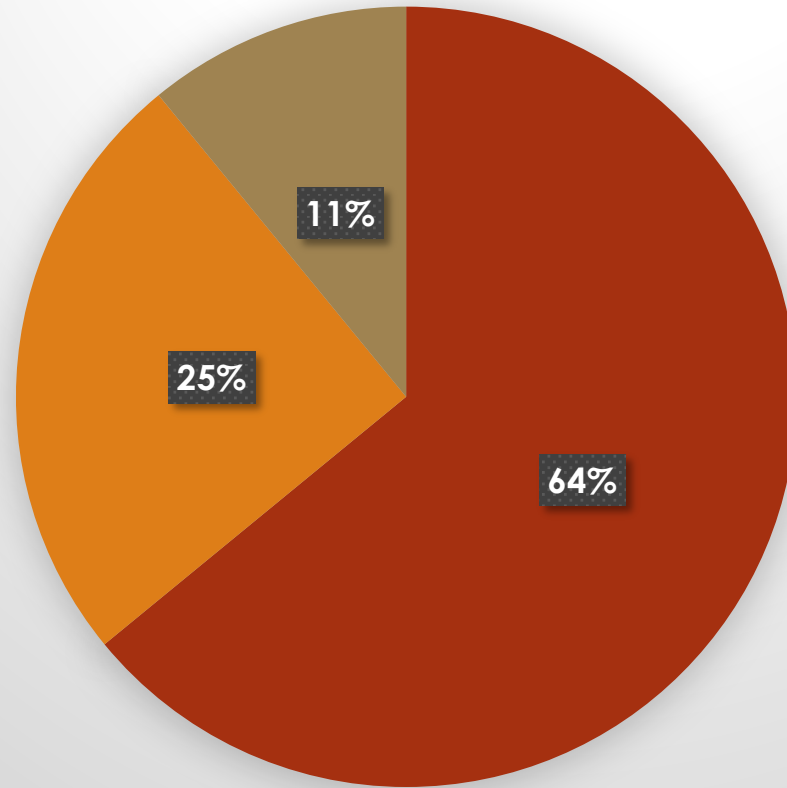


# *Domestic landscapes by Zoe Partington*



# Sewing machine AD

Did you enjoy this AD?



■ Yes ■ No ■ I am not sure



## 4. Discussion of Results

- No significant difference in preferences in the AD by the artist and AD by Flexiguía: half of the participants enjoyed the AD by artists and half the AD by Flexiguía.
- Yet, there was a significant difference in preferences when participants were exposed to a mixed, crafted AD containing insights from the artist about technique, process, feelings towards piece, artists' analogies...
- No direct correlation with degree of eyesight and type of AD (blind users would prefer AD1 and partially sighted, AD2).

## 5. Conclusions and final reflections

- The artistic experience of blind and visually-impaired museum goers seem to be elevated by a more personal and poetic AD that incorporates the artist's own feelings, purpose, and emotions.
- Very similar results and reactions were recently found in the screening of the documentary *Where Memory Ends* by Pablo Romero Fresco. He created the AD from his perspective as a film director sharing his insights about technique, his emotions toward the characters, etc.
- And even though AD for the screen and AD for the art is different, in art there is even more room for subjectivity and artists contributions.
- AD as not only an accommodation, but also an an artistic contribution on its own.
- Access as a conversation (Romero Fresco, 2022) and as a transformational experience (Greco & Romero Fresco, 2023; Martin, 2020; Romero-Fresco & Brown, 2023) not only for non-sighted audiences, but sighted as well.

# References

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