Audio description:

**The artist invites you to touch the wall based artwork as well as the small replica etching beside it.**

**To follow is an audio description of the artwork and then an artist commentary. This is followed by a reading of the overlaid text by the artist which is of 5 minutes duration.**

**The recording will play in a continuous loop.**

Titled ‘Breaking Down Barriers’ this artwork made in 2022 is by Fae Kilburn.

It is a silkscreen print and textured wall vinyl, 125 cm wide and 182 cm in height. Made of smooth vinyl with textured lettering, it is designed to be touched.

The vinyl shows a close-up monochrome portrait of a female, with quotes layered over the face in lines of red text, running left to right all down the image.

The face is pale and that of a younger female, whose features, in particular down their right side, have been smudged to the point that the portrait is distorted. The subject’s right eye for example, is more or less obliterated by a trail of black ink. The nostrils and mouth too are smeared.

The quotes that run across her face are from blind and visually impaired artists about barriers they face in the arts and in their lives.

For example, we find: “I’m not looking for pity, I’m an independent person, who just happens to be blind”

And “Ask before you touch. Know I navigate the world independently every day”

And “If I hide my sight loss you treat me as an equal. Loss of sight does not mean I'm less qualified than you!”

Often urgent in tone, and composed in red ink of varying font styles, the texts run in streams across the image, one after the other, forming a cascade of words of protest, rather than a single slogan or repeated message. Combined with the smears and distortions of the portrait, it conveys an angry riot of voices and appeals to be listened to.

A small-scale etching of the artwork is mounted next to it, to enhance accessibility for those who wish to explore it by touch.

Artist description of Breaking Barriers (wall):

Breaking Barriers 2022 by Fae Kilburn. Silkscreen print and textured wall vinyl. 125 cm by 182 cm. Touch the wall mounted artwork and the small scale etching next to the artwork. The wall vinyl shows a close up portrait of a visually impaired female, with quotes from other blind and partially sighted people overlaying it in text made with a textured surface. The piece explores the stigma faced by many and the preconceived ideas people have of what people with sight loss can and cannot achieve, to the rich and stimulating way sight loss often in forms and artists practice. I also created an A3 zinc etching of this piece that offers visual and tactile contrast.

Artist commentary:

Breaking Barriers is a tactile wall vinyl that shows a close up portrait of a visually impaired female in midnight blue. Layered over the top running from left to right in bright red are quotes by other blind and partially sighted people. The image is 1.25 m wide by 1.82 m long and is flush to the wall. The large portrait is imposing as the female stares out at the viewer, with big wide eyes refusing to be ignored. The layered quotes are the voices of many partially sighted and blind individuals, including Clarke Reynolds, David Johnson, Duncan Meerding, Rachel Gadson, amongst others, expressing their positive and negative lived experience. I felt this layered approach was important to the piece, an opportunity for visually impaired individuals to be seen, heard, and show how diverse our experiences are, the barriers faced and how these perspectives inspire our art. The portrait and quotes feel like textured wallpaper to the touch. The blank areas are smooth. I combined silkscreen print and tactile vinyl to create this piece so that my work could be engaged through sight and touch.

Artist description of Breaking Barriers (etching):

An A3 etching on zinc. A close up portrait of a visually impaired female, with quotes from other blind and partially sighted people laid over the top. The portrait and letters etched black are rough to the touch, and unetched areas are smooth, cold and shiny offering visual and tactile contrast. I felt it was important to have a smaller version of Breaking Barriers on a material that offered high visual and tactile contrast and enabled visitors to get up close and touch the entire piece.

Wall vinyl quotes:

I'm not looking for pity. I'm an independent person who just happens to be blind. Ask before you touch. No I navigate the world independently every day. If I hide my sight loss, you treat me as an equal. Loss of sight does not mean I'm less qualified than you. Why are you so shocked? I'm educated. Take a moment and think about what that says about you, not me. The gallery spaces that once felt like sanctuaries are now filled with barriers. The access often hidden, leaving me feeling lost, isolated and excluded. The fine art world is the most elitist when it comes to disability as I'm sure you've come across, whereas theatre and dance have been much more embracive as far as working with the disabled performers, and disabled people. I think the fine art world hasn't even got off the starting block yet. The galleries are happy for us to deliver audio descriptive tours, and run workshops, but not exhibit the work of blind and partially sighted artists. Disabled art is not in fashion yet. And apparently, until that time, disabled artist's work will remain out of the mainstream and undervalued. Despite so many artist's work throughout history being influenced by their sight loss and changing the art world forever, today's generation remains excluded. Why is my lived experience and perspective of the world less valued? Because I'm an openly blind artist? My work is exhibited in galleries. When they don't know I'm blind. Why should it matter if I can see or not? Surely it's the quality of the art that matters. Being a blind painter is liberating. It's the ultimate letting go. Using my feelings and memory to guide me. There's no getting hung up on detail. Total blindness affords me direct access to the rich and under-explored world of visualisation, i.e. the inner visions of the imagination. My disability influenced the way I create and the philosophy around it. The way I make it, and what I bring to it, I think it has right from day one in a very authentic way. The light patterns thrown by a lot of my work is influenced by the way I see. My world is beautiful. It's layers of translucent, pale colours, with no hard edges. Being blind means I'm forever young, and the world is a clean and beautiful place. What's your world like? Thinking of blindness as another mode of being rather than a diminished or depleted way of being, which granted is not always easy to do, allows you to enjoy the rich and sumptuous interplay of all the senses working together. So with blindness, a tree in the wind, for example, quickly becomes a soundscape. The tree's size, shape, character and relationship to you are offered to you as a blind beholder in new and exciting ways. I've only had one non patronising accessible experience in my entire life. Imagine what a lifetime of access would be like and how confident that generation would be. I've been told throughout my entire life that I could not be an artist because I'm blind. Now in my 90s, I'm being taught by a partially sighted artist. If only I'd experienced this in my youth. I create accessible art workshops because I faced so many barriers myself. When people ask what I do, I say I'm an artist. They say, 'ah, isn't it nice you've got a hobby'. People underestimate me. They can't see past the blindness to see what skills I have to offer. For me, one of the biggest barriers is people's attitudes towards me. They change their tone and talk slower once they notice my white cane. People's assumptions is that they know more than me because they can see. I think a lot of accessibility or patronising things happen when people are unsure, scared, or have preconceived notions of what people can and can't do. Using the terms left and right and in front or behind, rather than here and there, helps break another barrier. Because where does over there mean? You've got to have institutional change, and you've got to have society wide change for real inclusion. People see disability as other and without changing that we're always going to be pushing uphill. I get frustrated with unnecessarily unfulfilled plans or ambitions due to barriers that could easily be removed if society was arranged differently. For an inclusive society, there needs to be a better understanding of the barriers faced and the social and political will to change things for the better.