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National Public Radio (NPR)

SHOW: Morning Edition (11:00 AM AM ET) - NPR

September 23, 2003 Tuesday

LENGTH: 710 words

HEADLINE: Tactile photography exhibit in London

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BODY:

BOB EDWARDS, host:

The sight of the World Trade Center collapsing in clouds of dust is etched in the public's memory. For the blind, however, the memories are made up of sounds and emotions. The blind will be able to visualize the Twin Towers and other images at an exhibition of tactile photographs. Carrie Giardino visited the exhibit at London's Natural History Museum and has this report.

CARRIE GIARDINO reporting:

An eyewear designer and a well-known French aerial photographer teamed up and produced photographs even the blind can see, simply by touching them. Thirty tactile photos are now on exhibit at the Natural History Museum in London as part of a larger exhibit called Earth from the Air. The artists created the variations in the photos by utilizing a type of plastic in order to create texture which gives the sense of depth, light and shadow. One of the photos is of the World Trade Center.

Mrs. KAY(ph) CHASE (Tourist): So what's this point right here, Rich? Is that...

Mr. RICHARD CHASE (Tourist): That's the...

Mrs. CHASE: ...where Windows on the World...

Mr. CHASE: That's the television t...

Mrs. CHASE: Oh, that's the television antenna? And where's Windows on the World?

Mr. CHASE: Well, that would have been on...

Mrs. CHASE: Right over...

Mr. CHASE: That would've been...

Mrs. CHASE: ...there.

GIARDINO: Richard and Kay Chase are visiting from the United States and made the exhibit their first stop because they had heard about the tactile photographs. Although they are from New York, Mrs. Chase, who has been blind since birth, had never been up in the World Trade Center and did not have a very good idea of what it looked like.

Mrs. CHASE: I've never had any vision, so it's--you know, I can imagine, but it's not the same thing. I mean, like here, one of the things that's really been fascinating for me is to see how he shows shadows. And where the shadows are smooth, like with the trees in several of these pictures--you know, the trees have more of a rough texture but then the shadow of the tree is smooth. And seeing that tactilely now, all of a sudden that sort of clicks and made sense.

GIARDINO: The exhibit was put together by French aerial photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand and his friend Alain Mikli, who helped develop the tactile images in the same type of plastic he had used to make eyeglasses. Arthus-Bertrand came up with the idea after a group of blind schoolchildren visited his exhibit of environmental photos in Paris.

Mr. YANN ARTHUS-BERTRAND (Photographer): For two hours, I was trying to explain to all these young blind how to understand my photo, and it was so hard, and I was so moved, you know, I was near to cry because this young boy was waiting for what I say. You know, and after these two hours of visit, we were working for two years to try to put the photography in And it was quite difficult to do, and seems to be working well, but it's not finished. It's not enough.

GIARDINO: Arthus-Bertrand spent nearly a decade traveling around the world, taking photographs for his Earth from the Air exhibit. His focus is to help protect the environment and map the changes that occur for the benefit of future generations. Only 30 of the 160 photos in the exhibit have been reproduced in tactile form. From the Corcovado in Rio de Janeiro to icebergs in Antarctica to camels in Mauritania, the tactile photos recreate images from around the world. David Clark, a member of England's blind soccer team, recently visited the exhibit.

Mr. DAVID CLARK (Soccer Player): The most difficult thing for a blind person, I think, is to get used to the contours and to get that feel for the way things drop away and the landscape

aspect to it.

GIARDINO: Mr. Clark says he had never had much interest in photography until he came to this exhibit.

Mr. CLARK: And what this has done for me today by coming to this exhibition is that we've seen various things here that I simply would never even have given consideration to, and it opens your mind.

GIARDINO: The Earth from the Air exhibit will continue at London's Natural History Museum through October and then may travel to other cities.

For NPR News, I'm Carrie Giardino reporting from London.

LOAD-DATE: September 23, 2003