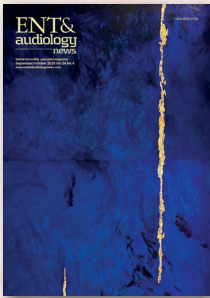


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# The art of hearing: *a conversation between silence and colour*



The image on this issue's cover is not merely an artwork – it is a conversation. A conversation in colour. A dialogue between silence and sound, between science and emotion. It is part of a monumental triptych, two metres high and six metres wide, created as the centrepiece for the exhibition *Hearing, Seeing, and Feeling* in the museum of Valkenburg, the Netherlands.

Acrylic and medium on specially prepared fabric. Rich royal blue, with textured golden contours rising like frequencies across the canvas. It is a work that invites stillness. And listening.



This triptych was designed as an eye-catcher, but not for the sake of spectacle. It draws people in to reflect on the deeper meaning of sound and

silence. It is a visual meditation on hearing. Not the clinical hearing measured in decibels, but the human kind. The kind that connects. That touches.

The impact of this artwork grew stronger in the context of the exhibition *Voice of the Artist*, which I had the honour of curating together with the painter Jan van Genk, a professional artist, 82 years old and deaf since birth.

## A silent life, loudly painted

Jan was born into a world without sound and without audiological care. No hearing aids, no speech therapy, no recognition of the silent struggle he carried with him. And yet, he found a voice. Through paint.



His early works are deeply moving. Self-portraits marked by isolation, painted in muted tones, eyes searching for connection. But over the years, his palette changed. His canvases expanded. His art grew louder, more expressive, vibrant and daring. He no longer painted silence. He painted life.

When I visited his studio, I was overwhelmed by the honesty and richness of his oeuvre. As an audiologist, I could sense the emotional weight of a life lived without sound. As an artist, I felt the same weight lifted, transformed into something beautiful. Jan's life, though marked by profound hearing loss, is also a testament to resilience and expression.

## A shared space of meaning

For four weeks, our works stood together in one space: his paintings, full of memory and movement; mine, more abstract, minimal, inviting calm. While Jan's art gives voice to a life lived in silence, my triptych visualises the essence of hearing: the flow, the presence, the stillness from which sound emerges.

And here's where the magic happened: in front of that triptych, Jan paused. He studied its height, its colour, the rhythm in the golden structures. Then he said, through his interpreter:

*"Now I see how sound must feel. Calm. Expansive. From deep down to towering heights."*

He had never heard. But he *understood*. He saw something in my work that I had only sensed subconsciously while creating it. A translation of sound into space. Of hearing into colour.

Later that evening, Jan wrote me a note. Just a few words, as he always does:

*"These past weeks, I forgot I was deaf."*

That one sentence still rings in my mind. Especially that final word – *was*.

## The art of hearing

This triptych is not about acoustics – not yet. That will be the story of the next cover. But it is about space. About the importance of creating room for sound. For listening. For being heard.

Because hearing is not just a sense. It is a human need. It is what allows us to connect. To belong. And sometimes, it is through art that we hear each other best.

So, if this cover draws your eye – pause. Let it draw your attention inward and ask yourself:

*What do I hear, when I stop to listen?*



Scan to watch a video about the exhibition.  
**Voice of the Artist (STEM van de KUNSTENAAR)**  
Use the **CC** button for subtitles and **Settings** to choose your language.



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