

# Beyond the Measure of Hearing

**The Tactile Mind Weekly #30**

14 November 2003

*Coffee Shop Notes*

Sara Stallard

---

DeVIA—Deaf View Image Art—is generally seen as artwork that encompasses Deaf themes such as oppression or celebration of Deaf values and experiences. Such works may merely be experiential, being neither negative nor positive. That is, such art may not espouse any particular belief. This is what Louise Stern is studying now in London, using the art of Grigely and Williamson as the basis of her research focus.

The genre of DeVIA is also considered by many to apply to only the visual and fine arts. What then of the performing arts? What of ASL artistry such as the wildly creative work of Peter Cook? And especially, what of modern approaches in conceptual art, such as installations (for which Grigely is well-known), when fine arts media is not utilized? Lastly, what of hearing artists who create work that clearly carries Deaf content?

Helene Oppenheimer and her ceramic sculpture comes to mind. She is blind, and hearing, but her work utilizes ASL as a theme a great deal. And then there is Judith Treesburg, a writer, installation artist, and an occasional curator, who recently did the show "Hearing Aids Are Not Like Glasses," in conjunction with a retrospective of Betty Miller's artwork, which is currently on display at Washburn Arts Gallery at Gallaudet University.

In this show, which was also featured last year during the Deaf Way II conference, Treesburg set up a multi-media show, which involved old films of signers from different periods in the 20th century. There were pedestals displaying jars of old hearing aids, body aids, and glasses. In one corner, there was a space in which the viewers could draw and create their own audiograms and then hang them up on a string around the film viewing area (blank audiogram forms provided). On the walls there were blow-ups of selected text from the artist's experience as mother of a deaf daughter, along with select audiograms of notable persons in the Signing community, such as Katherine Jankowski, and MJ Bienvenu. Poster-size audiograms, on which select media was added, collage-style, to embellish the real personalities behind those audiograms.

Those audiograms were quite intriguing. Thought-provoking. A good step away from the pathological feel of audiometry and a good step closer to humanizing the person behind the audiogram. Imagine what it would be like if audiologists had to include information on people's personalities when evaluating them—like doctors who should care about their patients in a holistic manner, rather than mechanically. For sure their jobs would be hellish, addressing the vast humanity of deaf people.

This shouldn't be an attack on audiologists alone, either. We need to address how we really see such treatment on our own terms. Multi-media professor Tracey Salaway hit this point head on with her comment: "Do we ever share our audiograms with each other and compare them?" Maybe if we did, we could develop strategies to improve the experience of pathology in our lives. After all, isn't that what art does, to make us think or feel more keenly about things? And that is what DeVIA does, and what Treesburg did, without making too obvious of a negative or positive statement.

It's imperative to remember that DeVIA is not only about Deaf people and their experiences, but

also about how hearing people are involved in our lives.

---

© Sara Stallard. All rights reserved. Columns are not to be printed. Anyone desiring a printed form, should contact the author for permission.