

# El Dorado and De'VIA

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*Coffee Shop Notes*

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De'VIA and Deaf myths. They go hand in hand. Perhaps a bit too much.

For the purpose of this note, myth signifies archetype as a common experience, as expressed in whichever artwork. Deaf View Image Art, best known as De'VIA, is a concept developed and crystallized in a manifesto by nine artistically renowned signatories on 25 May 1989, in Washington, DC. In a nutshell, the De'VIA movement embodies artworks that depict images from "Deaf" perspectives.

A perspective, when shared by a few or more people, represents a common experience held by a group. For many Deaf people, such experiences are oppression, community building, language struggles, and visual orientation. Such stories, isolated incidents or repeated occurrences, work their way into our community's consciousness of what it means to be Deaf. Those archetypes define our mythology.

De'VIA artists are adept at exploring this mythology. Extracultural concepts can be utilized (Ann Silver's work incorporates Pop Art styles and holds some Japanese influence), but for the artwork to mean something to a Deaf person, an emotional or intellectual response has to be invoked through a shared experience. Eyes and hands are frequent motifs, and sign language is a common theme. Chuck Baird is one of the most prominent De'VIA artists, holding court with Betty Miller (the Mother of De'VIA), Susan Dupor, Mary Thornley, and the other signatories. De'VIA is popular within our community, being featured often at our conventions, expositions, and fairs. De'VIA artwork can be bought, in the original, or in form of books, cards, and posters.

One of the hopes of De'VIA is to educate outsiders about the Deaf experience. This is where the hand-in-handedness fails, unfortunately. Myth is loyal to its culture and alien to outsiders. This is the basis behind all the great differences of humanity, especially in war and religion. Hussein attempted to exploit his cultural mythology and use it to cajole his soldiers into battle during the Gulf Wars. Hitler seized on German nationalism, using common cultural frustrations, to achieve his agenda. Union soldiers believed in a land without slavery and won the American Civil War. People follow the myths they are most comfortable with.

Not to compare brutal dictators to Deaf artists, but we must not forget that if we want success as artists working with Deaf myths, we need to expect this success from within our own community. Unless we can sell our myths to outsiders. Get our myths ingrained in mainstream consciousness and into the big museums and galleries of NYC and London.

And it's a hard sell. Even in this so-called free country where good ideas are gold. How many De'VIA artists are financially sustained through their work alone? Not enough, that's for sure.

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