

Re-introducing Joseph Grigely

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Coffee Shop Notes

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(with thanks to Patti Durr for prompting this piece to be written earlier than planned)

Sometimes art is all about capitalizing on a previously unexplored concept, or sometimes it is about educating the public on an aspect of the human experience. Joseph Grigely did both. The perplexing thing is that despite the fact that his artwork stems from his life as a deaf person, he is not widely embraced as a De'VIA artist. Nor is he mentioned in the recently published DEAF ARTISTS OF AMERICA, although he started gaining critical acclaim more than ten years ago. This is a glaring omission, and here's why.

Deafened in 1967, Grigely began his postsecondary education at NTID and earned a Ph.D. from Oxford University in 1984. Having taught graduate courses at the University of Michigan, he is now on the faculty of the Art Institute of Chicago. In addition to his academic career, he is also known in the art world as the note writer.

What Grigely did was formulate the aesthetics of handwritten conversation, and examine the subtle nuances of human expression. He re-created these experiences with juxtaposed groupings of notes, arranged tableaux, and installed environments. In simpler terms, he saved written notes from talking with hearing people and put them together in visually or mentally appealing ways.

Grigely's work confronts people with the universal need for the exchange of ideas despite barriers. As the curator for the 1998 British touring exhibition VOICE OVER said, "The strangeness for the hearing person forces the reappraisal of the assumptions that underlie communication." One note from a show in Stockholm, Sweden reads as follows: "I think the suburbs are a little erotic Sshh!! people are listening." Only in conversing with a deaf person would a hearing person write something like this.

In his 1995 book TEXTUALTERITY, published by the University of Michigan Press while he was also a professor of English at Gallaudet University, Grigely examines how both written and visual artifacts change meaning in different contexts. His artwork is also featured in Phaidon Press's 1998 book CREAM: CONTEMPORARY ART IN CULTURE. There are other books that are unfortunately out of print.

For a Stockholm show, Andreas Gedin conducted a fascinating interview "A Conversation with Joseph Grigely," which can be found at

http://www.aim.se/Index/text/conversation_joseph_g.html In addition, here is a list of some URLs where visual examples of Grigely's work are available:

http://www.gandy-gallery.com/exhib/joseph_grigely/exhib_joseph_grigely.html

<http://www.cca-kitakyushu.org/project/grigleyex.html>

<http://www.airdeparis.com/grigely.htm>

<http://www.jackhanley.com/id57.htm>

<http://revolutn.com/archive/grig/>

Californians may also be interested to know that as a Wattis Artist-in-Residence with the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco in 2004, Grigely will exhibit past and new works, as well as conducting a series of public programs (www.yerbabuenaarts.org).

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