

The Classification of DeVIA: Part I

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Aesthetics or Concepts?

According to the most condense of art histories, Fauvists used a lot of color and painted in broad strokes. Synthetic and Analytic Cubism differentiate by the composition and deconstruction of elements, respectively. Swiss Modernists were concerned with clarity and simplicity. Dadaism avoided making sense through the jumble of discordant elements. Surrealism was rooted in fantasy. At first glance, such genres tend to be identified through their aesthetic markers, despite the socio-cultural movements and changes responsible for the initial inception.

This approach to identification of genre in art seems problematic when it comes to DeVIA. More so than the genres mentioned above, DeVIA is deeply rooted in the experience of a people, who also happen to be a minority. DeVIA also exhibits a wide range of influences from varying periods of Art, which prevents us from identifying aesthetic characteristics that are unique to DeVIA. Concepts seem to be the main focus behind DeVIA work—that is, whatever the visual appeal of the artwork is, it would still identify as DeVIA because, at the bottom line, the subject matter is based on Deaf life.

DeVIA is significant to our community and for interested outsiders because of the ideas they express, regardless of personal aesthetic taste. This was the basis of the DeVIA manifesto—the need to show what it is like being Deaf. Indeed, in *DEAF ARTISTS IN AMERICA*, Sonnenstrahl describes the forces behind DeVIA artwork. She even discusses the evolution of DeVIA as artists explore and uncover the deeper nuances of Deaf life. In *DEAF WAY II VISUAL ARTISTS*, the artists frequently cite their Deaf experiences as sources of inspiration.

It might seem appropriate, then, to classify DeVIA characteristics by concept, instead of visual style. Common threads related to experience, rather than style, can be found more readily between works by different DeVIA artists. This approach would enhance our comprehension of the many issues behind DeVIA and enable newcomers to relate with DeVIA better. Art always communicates something, and DeVIA artists have plenty to say through their work. Those themes ought to be compared and categorized into genres and sub-genres, for increased understanding of the intricate nature of DeVIA.

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