

# The Classification of De'VIA: Part III

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*Coffee Shop Notes*

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## Grey Areas

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Applying the terms Affirmative or Audist to DeVIA artwork is broad enough when it comes to splitting the DeVIA genre into sub-genres, but what is confusing are the markers. Either sub-genre can have one or more of the tentatively identified conceptual marker(s): Linguistic, Narrative, or Iconic; and those markers do not necessarily resolve whether the work is Affirmative or Audist.

The determination of whether a given DeVIA work is Affirmative or Audist relies on the information as narrated or spelled/signed out or even abstracted by these markers. This can cause difficulty when you see an obvious handshape or sign, such as in MJ Seltzer's "Personal Space," which is a large composition made from graphite, metals, and collage measuring 40"x 52"x 2.5" (DWII Featured Visual Artists).

In this expressive piece, there are faces and hair and wispy-like lines that seem to blow around. At the lower left, there are two hands, in a tight "5" handshape with the thumbs drawn in close, but not tucked in like "B", which seem to sign something like "space" or "apart." The faces with their soulful expressions have a narrative quality, while the handshapes are a linguistic marker, having signified ASL as a device for communicating something.

It is hard to tell how the artist intended for us to understand "Personal Space." Is it sharing a positive or negative experience? Personal space can be good, but it can also be isolating, especially if imposed upon the person by a society that rejects him/her. Although the linguistic marker is clear, identifying this as a piece of DeVIA, the placing of this work into either DeVIA sub-genre is uncertain.

Indeed, this is a challenge Seltzer has posed for anybody who wishes to neatly package DeVIA into crisp sub-genres and it is probably not a coincidence that in the DWII Featured Visual Artists book, she states "Language can bring people together or keep them apart—a barrier or a bridge."

Like "Personal Space," enigmas tend to lurk stubbornly around the boundaries of a given paradigm, but it is those boundaries we need to establish, walls we need to build, in order to make sense of the whole.

Then once those definitions are in place, we can find the exceptions. DeVIA can only stand to benefit from such explorations, both by learning and by creating.

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