

The Mug of Life

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Coffee Shop Notes

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When I enter a coffee shop, my brain switches on. Coffee shops are full of character, especially local chains and independent shops. They reveal a lot about the local community and the customers who hang out there. I love seeing people relaxing at their tables, reading the day's newspaper, chatting, working on their laptops, or doodling in their sketchbooks. The interior decoration tends to be very artsy, with murals or a showcase of local artwork, as well as plenty of local advertisements and newspapers laying around. The best ones also have bookshelves where you can take or leave a book.

The variety of visual stimulation (from the walls and people) inspires endless wandering through the cavernous archives of my mind, pen in hand and notebook ready to record my observations and introspections. If I forget my notebook, I write in the margins of whatever book I have on hand, or when desperate, on a napkin (they tear easily, though!).

The part of my personality that draws me to a coffee shop is also the same part that draws me into dialogue, signed or written, with contemporary thinkers in my community. All the political/social/cultural trends that show up in coffee shops are the same trends that show up in a critically creative community, and The Tactile Mind is one such venue that caters to the needs of this in the signing community.

TTM maintains its focus on art, literature, and rhetoric by signers; this is why I joined up as a columnist for the Weekly. The values of TTM are very similar to the values I readily observe in coffee shops. Intellectual advancement and visual culture are the stuff of my life, and all the pleasure I get from this creativity would not be possible without other people who create. I consider it very important to maintain an ongoing awareness of who/what/where/when/why and how, when it comes to art and other creative work by my deaf and signing contemporaries—and nothing satisfies me more than helping to share this awareness, so that others might be inspired to create, as well. What goes around comes around.

The act of drinking coffee, for me, also symbolizes a mental internalization of world cultures, with their sheer complexity, from developing countries and their laborers, to frivolous bourgeois materialism, and all the nuances of resistance and adhesion flailing out in between. The perpetual shifting of social values and their impact on our lives.

In honor of the one-year anniversary of this column and the Weekly, I have arranged with a friend, an artist and former design classmate of mine, Laura Kim, to share with you one of her images. This is an untitled collage of dark and light newsprint pieces with random text creating a profile portrait of a young woman holding up a mug of coffee.

Instead of insulting your intelligence with a lengthy explanation of why I wanted to showcase this particular image, I offer you this link instead: <http://www.articulatedeaf.com/coffeegirl.jpg>

Enjoy!

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