

# Walker's "Deaficide"

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*Coffee Shop Notes*

Sara Stallard

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Last fall, the Deaf Studies Department at Gallaudet University received a gift from Erin Whitney, a DeVIA painting entitled "Deaficide of the Innocent," by watercolorist Robert Walker. This gift was presented to the Department in honor of a film about Audism, made by Dr. H-Dirksen L. Bauman and his students.

Whitney, who is Vice-President of the Maryland Association of the Deaf, shared how moved she was when watching the film last summer, "the man next to me cried..." She then determined she would find a way to praise and reward Bauman and his students for their hard work. Not long afterward, she came across Walker's work online, through the River Market ArtSpace gallery in Little Rock, Arkansas, and rescued "Deaficide" from the well-meaning interest of an audiological clinic.

She only had the painting in her possession for about "10 minutes," she laughs. Indeed the painting is an image that would grace the walls of the Deaf Studies Department better than it would in somebody's home. Audist DeVIA at its most subtle, this picture depicts a young boy, smiling softly with sparkling eyes, while the cords of his hearing aids snake out around his neck numerous times before flailing out to the side.

At first glance, there is nothing overtly menacing in this picture, and its simple guile, especially in the boy's eyes, is deceptive. Another veil also lies in the soft watercolor and gouache mosaic style of Walker's. His watercolors ARE sought after in equestrian circles in Arkansas, and one of his non-DeVIA works, "Grand Prix Day," was highlighted on the cover of Gallaudet University's 2002 Honor Roll of Donors. In "Deaficide" the same surface treatment is applied, only in a more compact manner, with a subdued blue background. Only until the viewer understands the implications of being strangled, as the winding cord suggests, by others' intentions, does "Deaficide" become an insidious image.

Deaf Studies graduate student Sara Robinson, who is specializing in the Deaf History concentration, when asked for comment, said "I think [the painting] is very politically sensitive, but it does reflect my personal experience with the whole idea of using a phonic ear." She also mentioned the waste of time and public resources using in enforcing hearing aid use in the classroom at the expense of other concerns.

In a conversation with the artist, R.F. Walker as he signs his canvases, he confirmed Robinson's sentiments about the frustration of being forced to use speech to accommodate hearing people. He also related that "Deaficide" is the first in what will be a series. His second portrait, "Deaficide of the innocent #2" is of a frowning girl with pigtails and a chest hearing aid, whose hearing aid cords are being pulled by the hand of someone not in the picture. One of the cords is wrapped around the girl's left arm, which is upraised in a defensive stance. The picture was recently accepted into an up-coming juried exhibition for the Mid-Southern Watercolorist annual show, to be held in April—see their calendar:

<http://www.watercolor-online.com/MidSouthernWatercolorists/CalendarofEvents/CalendarofEvents.htm>

Drop by the Deaf Studies Department during office hours to see Whitney's gift of "Deaficide of the Innocent" which hangs next to Bauman's door, but be sure to consult the receptionist first. Or click on the following link—<http://www.thetactilemind.com/weekly/walker.html>—to view jpps of the two "Deaficide" paintings, along with images of two other works, courtesy of the artist. Read his statement and see more of his work at <http://www.rivermarketartspace.com/> Look soon, before their website directory is updated.

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